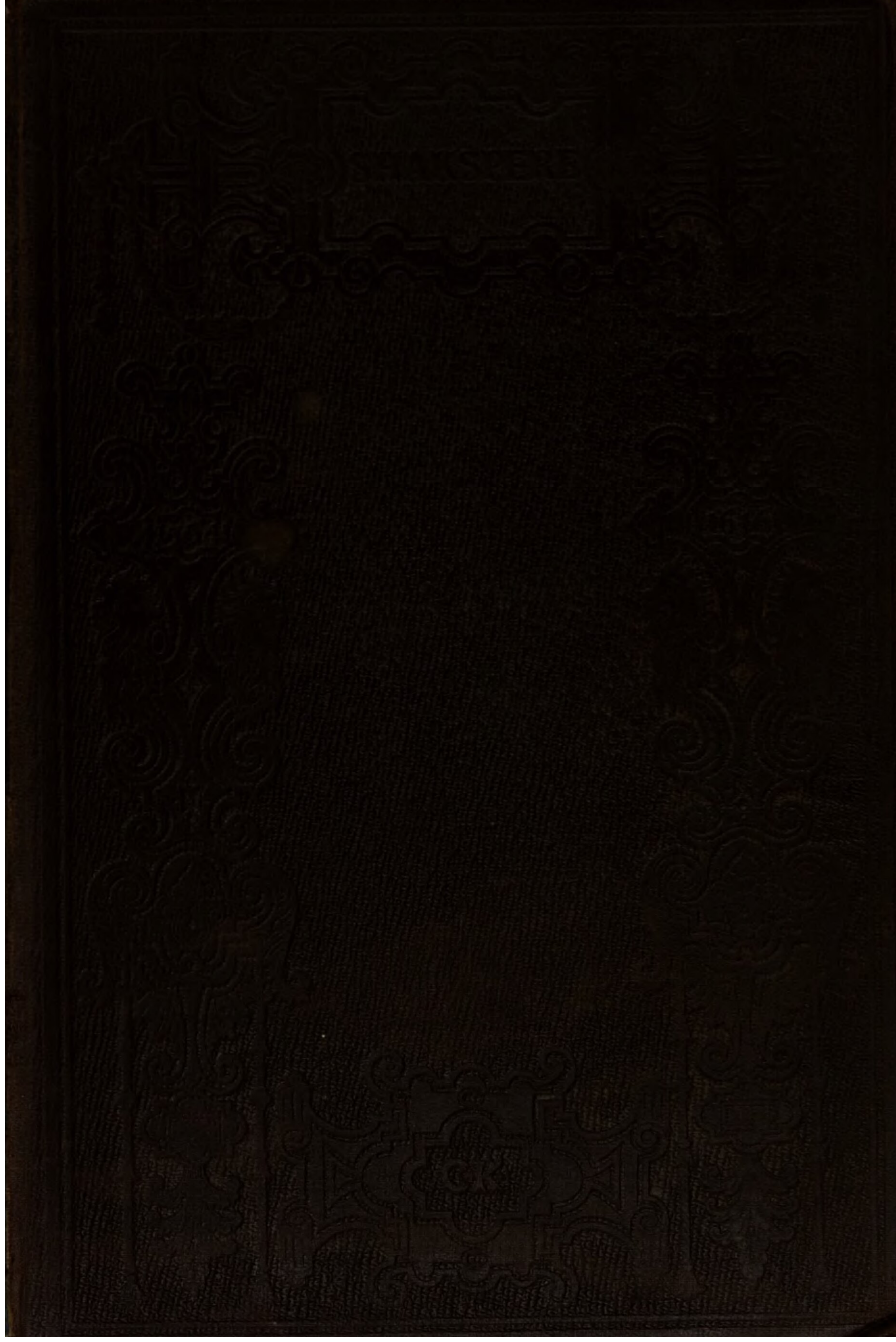




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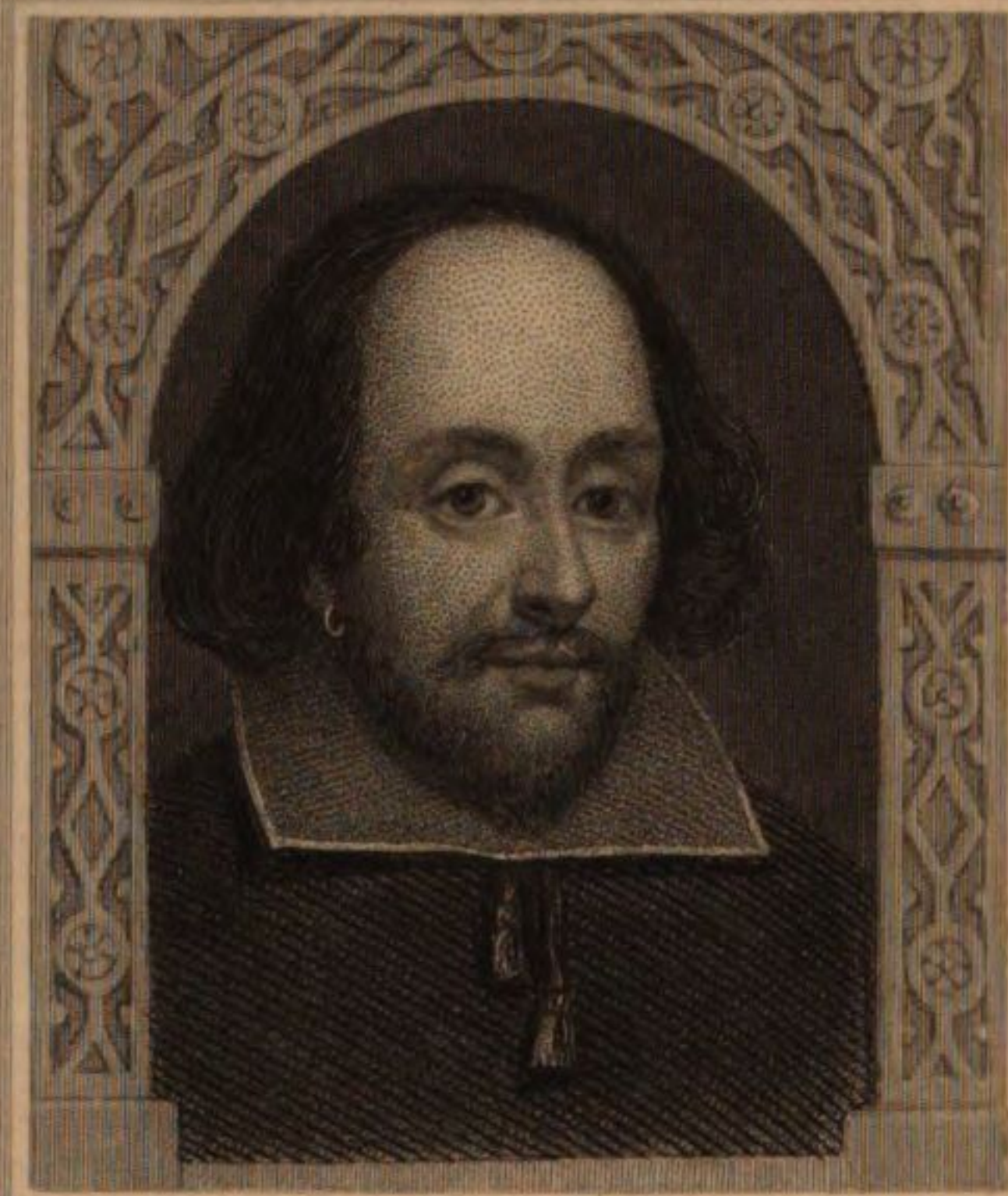
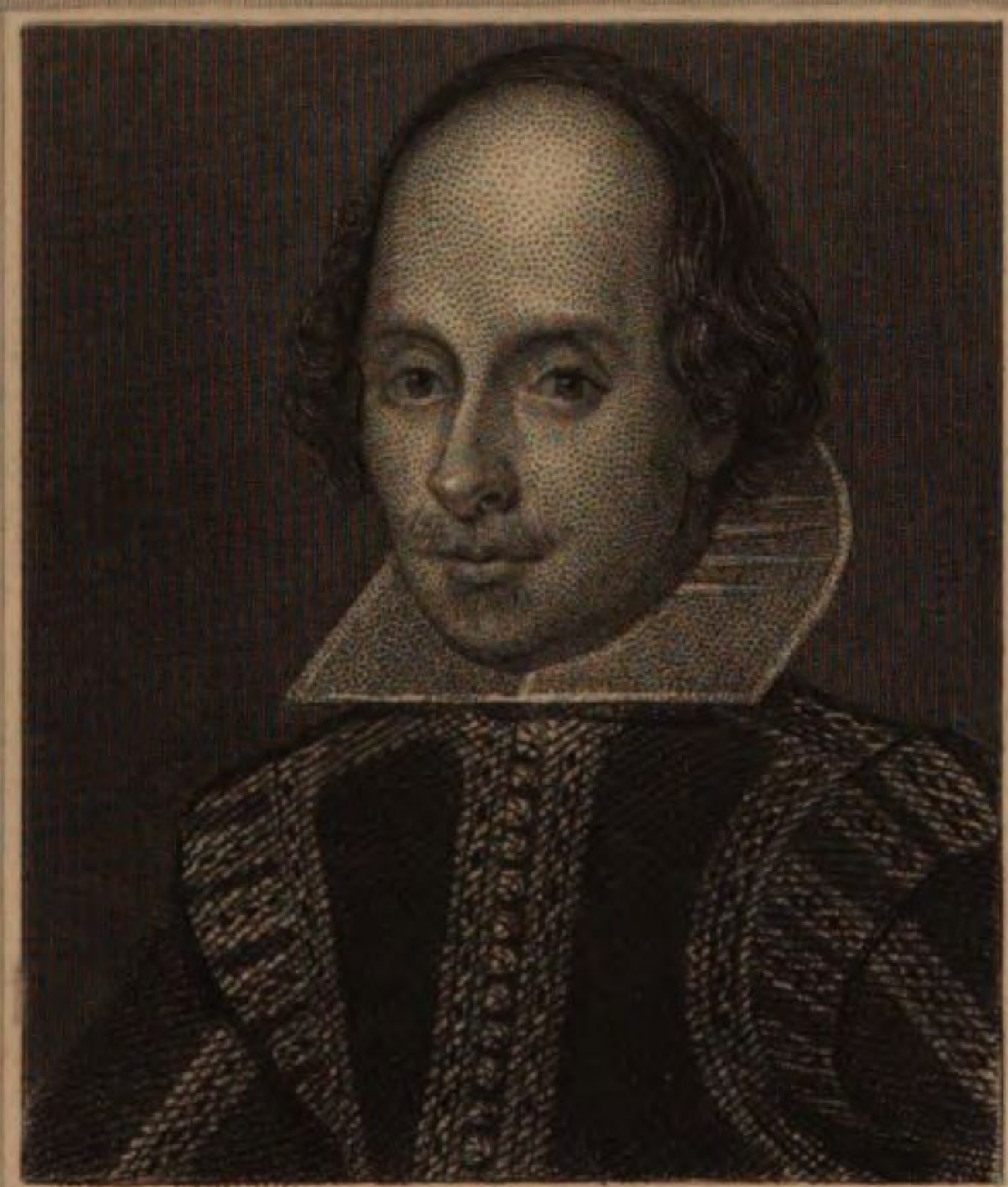
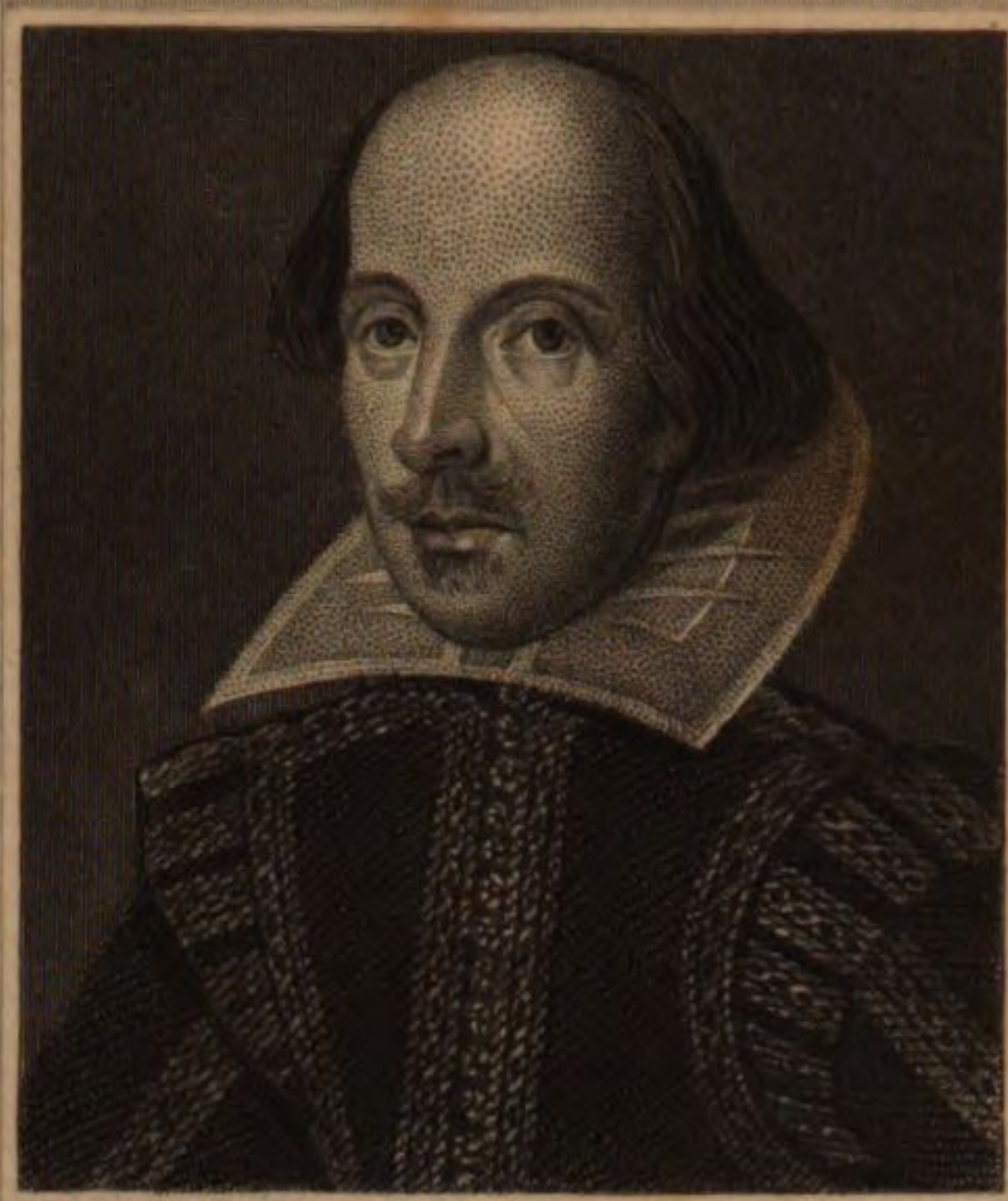
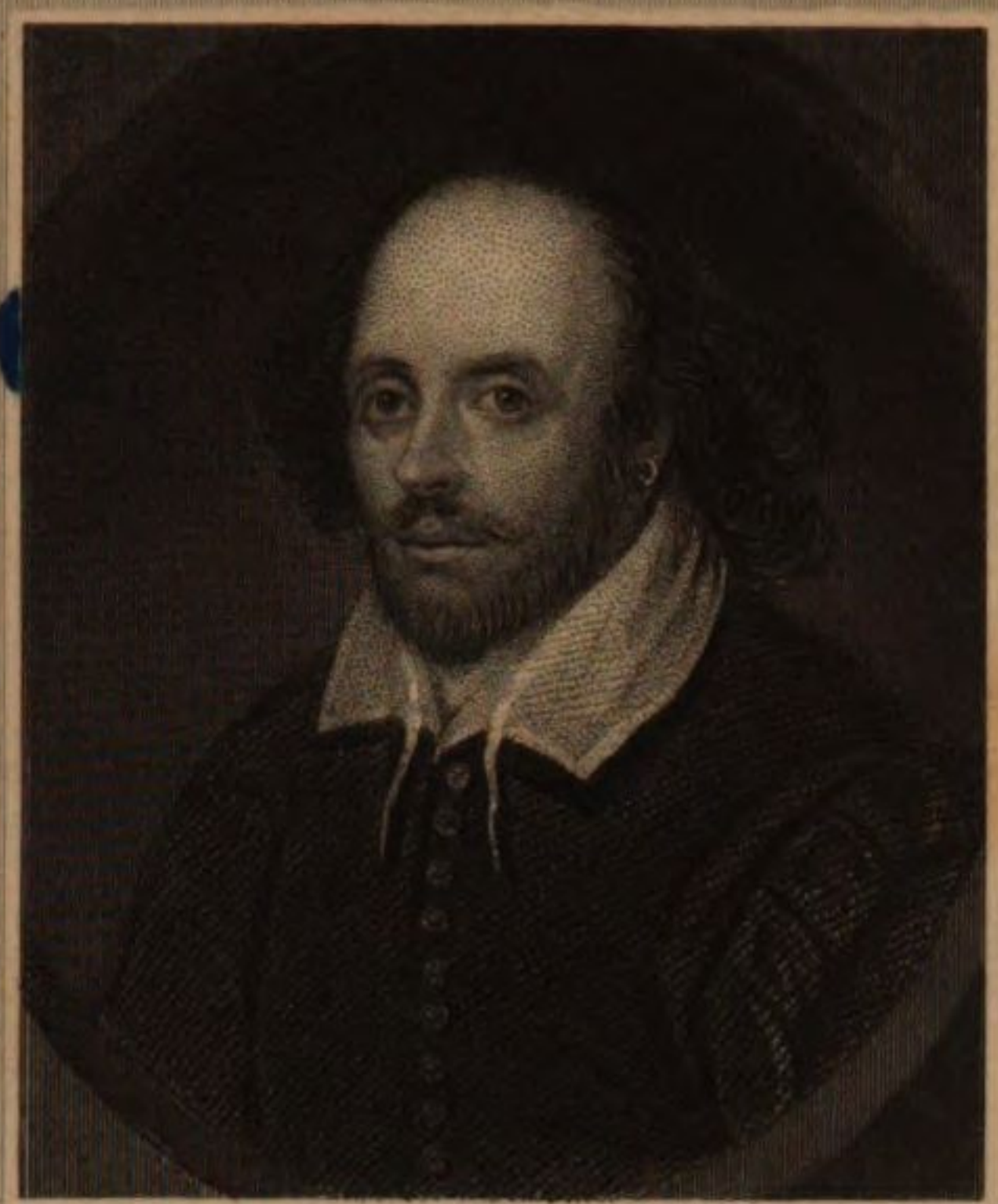
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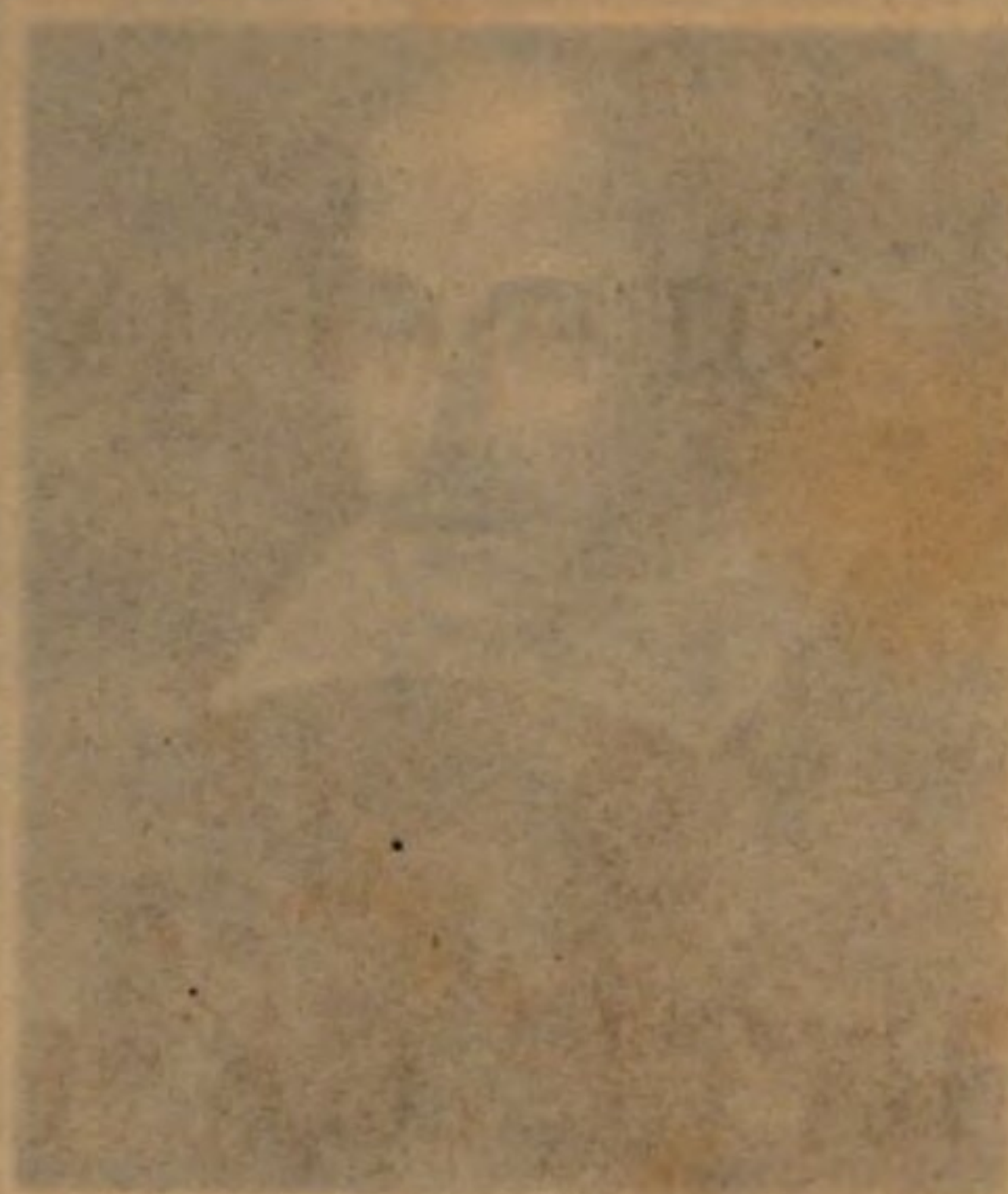
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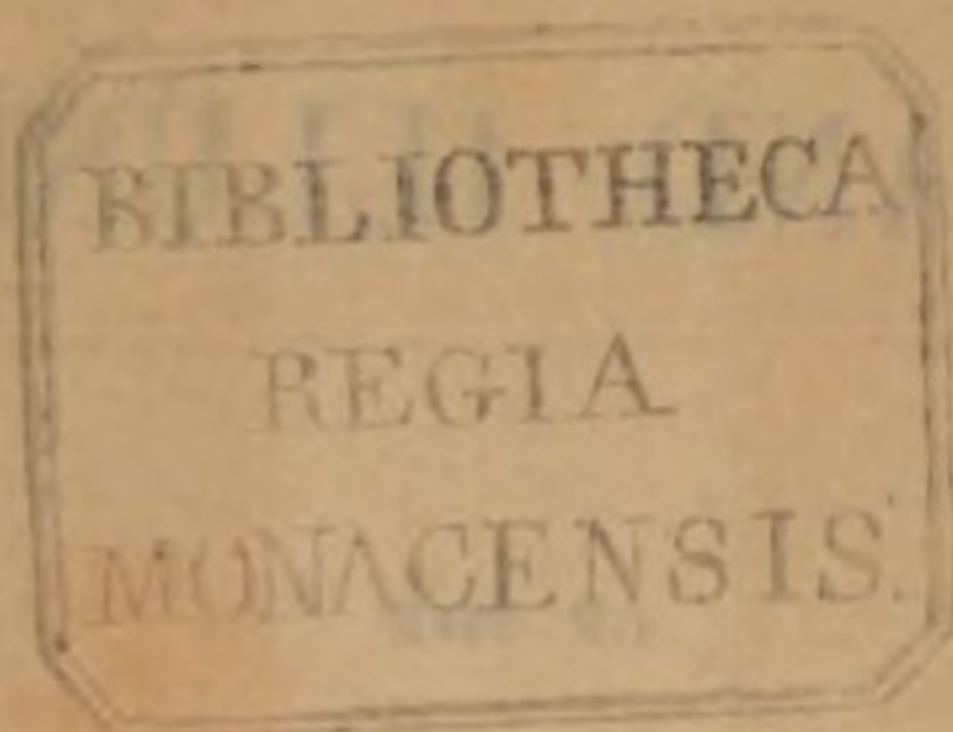
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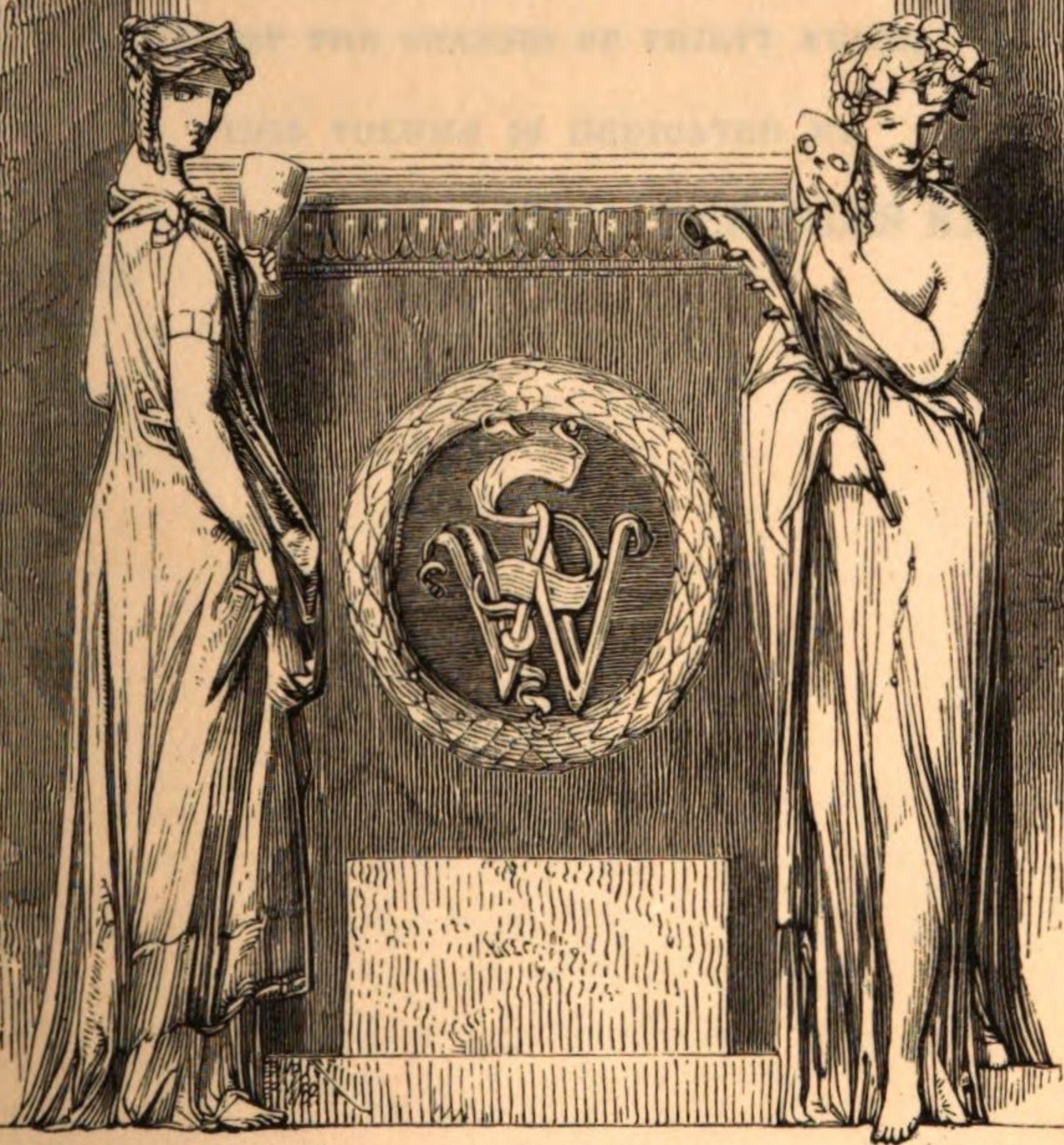
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THE present Volume, entitled 'Studies of Shakspeare,' forming the Second Volume of 'Studies and Illustrations,' consists of a republication, with additions and corrections, of the critical Notices that are scattered through my editions of Shakspeare, known as 'the Pictorial' and 'the Library.'

There are very few readers who have not access to some edition of the works of "the greatest in our literature—the greatest in all literature." But there are a vast number who have no aids in the proper appreciation of Shakspeare's excellence, dependent as such a judgment is upon an adequate comprehension of his principles of art. In developing those principles I have felt it necessary, on the one hand, to combat some opinions of former editors which were addressed to an age nearly without poetry; which looked upon the age of Shakspeare as equally remarkable for the rudeness as for the vigour of its literature; and which considered Shakspeare himself under the vulgar aspect of the miraculous,—a genius perfectly untaught and unregulated. On the other hand, I have as sedulously brought forward and enforced the doctrines of that more recent school of æsthetics which holds that "the Englishman who, without reverence, a proud and affectionate reverence, can utter the name of William Shakspeare, stands disqualified for the office of critic." These Essays, therefore, are not to be received as the opinions of an individual, but as an embodiment of the genial spirit of the new school of Shakspearean criticism, as far as a humble disciple may interpret that spirit.

But even to those who are familiar with critical editions of Shakspeare, and with the great mass of critical writings upon Shakspeare, the present volume will have the value of a comprehensive arrangement. It will exhibit the rude beginnings of the Drama previous to Shakspeare's appearance; it will trace the growth of his powers, as far as can be gathered from positive and circumstantial evidence, in his earliest works; it will carry forward the same analysis through the second period of his meridian splendour; it will show, in like manner, the glory of his mature day, and the sober lustre of his evening. In each of these periods the characters and productions of his dramatic contemporaries will be examined. The reader will proceed step by step in a systematic knowledge of the Shakspearean Art, and view it in connection with the circumstances which attended it in each successive stage of its advancement.

CHARLES KNIGHT.

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STUDIES OF SHAKSPERE.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

PAGEANTS AND MYSTERIES.

THE city of Coventry, within a moderate distance of Stratford upon Avon, was amongst the last places which retained the ancient pageants. Before the Reformation, these pageants, "acted with mighty state and reverence by the friars of this house [the Grey Friars], had theatres for the several scenes, very large and high, placed upon wheels, and drawn to all the eminent parts of the city, for the better advantage of spectators; and contained the story of the New Testament composed into old English rhyme, as appeareth by an ancient manuscript, entitled *Ludus Corporis Christi*, or *Ludus Coventriæ*." * Henry V. and his nobles took great delight in seeing the pageants; Queen Margaret, in the days of her prosperity, came from Kenilworth to Coventry privily to see the play, and saw all the pageants played save one, which could not be played because night drew on; the triumphant Richard III. came to see the Corpus Christi plays; and Henry VII. much commended them†. In these Corpus Christi plays there were passages which had a vigorous simplicity, fit for the teaching of an uninstructed people. In the play of 'The Creation,' the pride of Lucifer disdained the worship of the angels, and he was cast down—

"With mirth and joy never more to mell."

* Dugdale.

† See Sharp's quotations from the manuscript Annals of Coventry, 'Dissertation,' page 4.

In the play of 'The Fall,' Eve sang—

"In this garden I will go see
All the flowers of fair beauty,
And tasten the fruits of great plenty
That be in Paradise;"

In the same play we have a hymn of Abel, very sweet in its music:—

"Almighty God, and full of might,
By whom all thing is made of nought,
To thee my heart is ready dight,
For upon thee is all my thought."

In the play of 'Noah,' when the dove returned to the ark with the olive-branch, there was a joyful chorus:—

"Mare vidit et fugit,
Jordanis conversus est retrorsum,
Non nobis, Domine, non nobis,
Sed nomini tuo da gloriam."

These ancient Coventry plays were forty-three in number‡. The general spread of knowledge might have brought other teaching, but they familiarized the people with the great scriptural truths; they gave them amusements of a higher nature than military games, and contentions of mere brute force. In the boyhood of Shakspeare the same class of subjects was handled by rude artificers.

‡ See the '*Ludus Coventriæ*,' published by the 'Shakespeare Society.'

The pageants thus performed by the Guilds of Coventry were of various subjects, but all scriptural. The Smith's pageant was the crucifixion; and most curious are their accounts, from 1449 till the time of which we are speaking, for expenses of helmets for Herod, and cloaks for Pilate; of tabards for Caiaphas, and gear for Pilate's wife; of a staff for the Demon, and a beard for Judas. There are payments, too, to a man for hanging Judas, and for cock-crowing. The subject of the Cappers' pageant was the Resurrection. They have charges for making the play-book and pricking the songs; for money spent at the first rehearsal and the second rehearsal; for supper on the play-day, for breakfasts and for dinners. The subject of the Drapers' pageant was that of Doomsday; and one of their articles of machinery sufficiently explains the character of their performance—"A link to set the world on fire," following "Paid for the barrel for the earthquake." We may readily believe that the time was fast approaching when such pageants would no longer be tolerated. It is more than probable that the performances of the Guilds were originally subordinate to those of the Grey Friars; perhaps devised and supported by the parochial clergy*. But when the Church became opposed to such representations—when, indeed, they were incompatible with the spirit of the age—it is clear that the efforts of the laity to uphold them could not long be successful. They would be certainly performed without the reverence which once belonged to them. Their rude action and simple language would be ridiculed; and, when the feeling of ridicule crept in, their nature would be altered, and they would become essentially profane. There is a very curious circumstance connected with the Coventry pageants, which shows the struggle that was made to keep the dramatic spirit of the people in this direction. In 1584 the Smiths performed, after many preparations and rehearsals, a new pageant, the Destruction

* It is clear, we think, that the pageants performed by the Guilds were altogether different from the 'Ludus Coventriæ,' which Dugdale expressly tells us were performed by the Grey Friars.

tion of Jerusalem. The Smiths applied to one who had been educated in their own town, in the Free School of Coventry, and who in 1584 belonged to St. John's, Oxford, to write this new play for them. The following entry appears in the city accounts:—

"Paid to Mr Smythe of Oxford the xvth daye of aprill 1584 for hys paynes for writing of the tragedye—xiiij^l, vj^s, viij^d."

We regret that this play, so liberally paid for when compared with subsequent payments to the Jonsons and Dekkers of the true drama, has not been preserved. It would be curious to contrast it with the beautiful dramatic poem on the same subject, by an accomplished scholar of our own day, also a member of the University of Oxford. But the list of characters remains, which shows that the play was essentially historical, exhibiting the contests of the Jewish factions as described by Josephus. The accounts manifest that the play was got up with great magnificence in 1584; but it was not played again until 1591, when it was once more performed along with the famous Hock Tuesday. It was then ordered that no other plays whatever should be performed; and the same order, which makes this concession "at the request of the Commons," directs "that all the May-poles that now are standing in this city shall be taken down before Whitsunday next, and none hereafter to be set up." In that year Coventry saw the last of its pageants. But Marlowe and Shakspeare were in London, building up something more adapted to that age; more universal: dramas that no change of manners or policies can destroy.

The 'Chester Mysteries,' which appear greatly to have resembled those of Coventry, were finally suppressed in 1574. Archdeacon Rogers, who in his MSS. rejoices that "such a cloud of ignorance" would be no more seen, appears to have been an eye-witness of their performance, of which he has left the following description:—(See Markland's 'Introduction to a Specimen of the Chester Mysteries.')

"They weare divided into 24 pagiantes according to the cōpanyes of the Cittie; and

every companye broughte forth the their pagiant, w^{ch} was the cariage or place w^{ch} the played in; and before these playes weare played, there was a man w^{ch} did ride, as I take it, upon St Georges daye throughe the Cittie, and there published the tyme and the matter of the playes in breefe: the weare played upon Mondaye, Tuesday, and Wensdaye in Whitson weeke. And thei first beganne at the Abbaye gates; and when the firste pagiante was played at the Abbaye gates, then it was wheled from thense to the Pentice, at the hyghe Crosse, before the

maior, and before that was donne the seconde came; and the firste went into the Watergate Streete, and from thense unto Bridge Streete, and so one after an other 'till all the pagiantes weare played appoynted for the firste daye, and so likewise for the seconde and the thirde daye. These pagiantes or carige was a hyghe place made like a howse with 2 rowmes, beinge open on the tope; the lower rowme theie apparrelled and dressed themselves, and the higher rowme theie played, and thei stode upon vi wheelles."

CHAPTER II.

BIBLE HISTORIES AND MORALITIES.

WE have very distinct evidence that stories from the Sacred Scriptures, in character perhaps very little different, from the ancient Mysteries, were performed upon the London stage at a period when classical histories, romantic legends, and comedies of intrigue, attracted numerous audiences both in the capital and the provinces. At the period which immediately preceded the true drama there was a fierce controversy on the subject of theatrical exhibitions; and from the very rare tracts then published we are enabled to form a tolerably accurate estimate of the character of the early theatre. In one of these tracts, which appeared in 1580, entitled 'A Second and Third Blast of Retrait from Plaies and Theaters,' we have the following passage:—"The reverend word of God, and histories of the Bible, set forth on the stage by these blasphemous players, are so corrupted by their gestures of scurrility, and so interlaced with unclean and whorish speeches, that it is not possible to draw any profit out of the doctrine of their spiritual moralities. For that they exhibit under laughing that which ought to be taught and received reverently. So that their auditory may return made merry in mind,

but none comes away reformed in manners. And of all abuses this is most undecent and intolerable, to suffer holy things to be handled by men so profane, and defiled by interposition of dissolute words." (Page 103.) Those who have read the ancient Mysteries, and even the productions of Bishop Bale which appeared not thirty years before this was written, will agree that the players ought not wholly to have the blame of the "interposition of dissolute words." But unquestionably it was a great abuse to have "histories of the Bible set forth on the stage;" for the use and advantage of such dramatic histories had altogether ceased. Indeed, although scriptural subjects might have continued to have been represented in 1580, we apprehend that they were principally taken from apocryphal stories, which were regarded with little reverence even by those who were most earnest in their hostility to the stage. Of such a character is the very curious play, printed in 1565, entitled 'A pretie new Enterlude, both pithie and pleasaunt, of the story of King Daryus, being taken out of the third and fourth chapter of the third book of Esdras.'

"The Prolocutor" first comes forward to explain the object of "The worthy Entertainment of King Daryus:"

"Good people, hark, and give ear awhile,
For of this enterlude I will declare the style.

A certain king to you we shall bring in
Whose name was Darius, good and virtuous;
This king commanded a feast to be made,
And at that banquet many people had.

And when the king in counsel was set
Two lords commanded he to be fet,
As concerning matters of three young men;
Which briefly showed their fantasy then:
In writings their meanings they did declare,
And to give them to the king they did not spare.

Now silence I desire you therefore,
For the Vice is entering at the door."

The stage-direction then says, "The Prologue goeth out and Iniquity comes in." This is "the formal Vice Iniquity" of 'Richard III.;" the "Vetus Iniquitas" of 'The Devil is an Ass;' the Iniquity with a "wooden dagger," and "a juggler's jerkin with false skirts," of 'The Staple of News.' But in the interlude of 'Darius' he has less complex offices than are assigned him by Gifford—"to instigate the hero of the piece to wickedness, and, at the same time, to protect him from the devil, whom he was permitted to buffet and baffle with his wooden sword, till the process of the story required that both the protector and the protected should be carried off by the fiend, or the latter driven roaring from the stage by some miraculous interposition in favour of the repentant offender."* The first words which Iniquity utters indicate, however, that he was familiar with the audience, and the audience familiar with him:—

"How now, my masters; how goeth the world now?

I come gladly to talk with you."

And in a most extraordinary manner he does talk; swaggering and bullying as if the whole world was at his command, till

* Ben Jonson's Works, Note on 'The Devil is an Ass.'

Charity comes in, and reads him a very severe lecture upon the impropriety of his deportment. It is of little avail; for two friends of Iniquity—Importunity and Partiality—come to his assistance, and fairly drive Charity off the stage. Then Equity enters to take up the quarrel against Iniquity and his fellows; but Equity is no match for them, and they all make way for King Darius. This very long scene has nothing whatever to do with the main action of the piece, or rather what professes to be its action. Its tediousness is relieved by the Vice, who, however dull was his profligacy, contrived to make the audience laugh by the whisking of his tail and the brandishing of his sword, assisted no doubt by some well-known chuckle like that of the Punch of our own days. King Darius, however, at length comes with all his Council; and most capital names do his chief councillors bear, not unworthy to be adopted even in courts of greater refinement—Perplexity and Curiosity. The whole business of this scene of King Darius is to present a feast to the admiring spectators. Up to the present day the English audience delights in a feast, and will endure that two men should sit upon the stage for a quarter of an hour, uttering the most unrepeatable stupidity, provided they seem to pick real chicken-bones and drink real port. The Darius of the interlude feasted whole nations—upon the representative system; and here Ethiopia, Persia, Judah, and Media eat their fill, and are very grateful. But feasts must have their end; and so the curtain closes upon the eaters, and Iniquity "cometh in singing:"—

"La, soule, soule, fa, my, re, re,
I miss a note I dare well say:
I should have been low when I was so high;
I shall have it right anon verily."

Again come his bottle-holders, Importunity and Partiality; and in the course of their gabble Iniquity tells them that the Pope is his father. Unhappily his supporters go out; and then Equity attacks him alone. Loud is their debate; and faster and more furious is the talk when Constancy and Charity come in. The matter, however,

ends seriously; and, they resolving that it is useless to argue longer with this impenitent sinner, "somebody casts fire to Iniquity," and he departs in a tempest of squibs and crackers. The business of the play now at length begins. Darius tells his attendants that the three men who kept his chamber while he slept woke him by their disputing and murmuring,—

"Every man to say a weightier matter than the other."

The subject of their dispute was, what is the strongest thing; and their answers, as we are informed by the King's attendants, had been reduced to writing:—

"The sentence of the first man is this,
Wine a very strong thing is;
The second also I will declare to you,
That the king is stronger than any other
thing verily;
The third also I will declare—
Women, saith he, is the strongest of all,
Though by women we had a fall."

Of their respective texts the three young men are then called in to make exposition; and certainly, whatever defects of manners were exhibited by the audiences of that day, they must have possessed the virtue of patience in a remarkable degree to have enabled them to sit out these most prolix harangues. But they have an end; and the king declares Zorobabel to be deserving of signal honours, in his demonstration that, of all things, woman is the strongest. A metrical prayer for Queen Elizabeth, uttered by Constancy, dismisses the audience to their homes*.

The most precise and interesting account which we possess of one of the earliest of the theatrical performances is from the recollection of a man who was born in the same year as William Shakspeare. In 1639 R. W. (R. Willis), stating his age to be seventy-five, published a little volume, called 'Mount Tabor,' which contains a passage which is essential to be given in any history or sketch of the early stage:—

* There is a copy of this very curious production in the Garrick Collection of Plays in the British Museum; and a transcript of Garrick's copy is in the Bodleian Library.

"UPON A STAGE PLAY, WHICH I SAW WHEN
I WAS A CHILD.

"In the city of Gloucester the manner is (as I think it is in other like corporations) that, when players of interludes come to town, they first attend the mayor to inform him what nobleman's servants they are, and so to get license for their public playing; and if the mayor like the actors, or would show respect to their lord and master, he appoints them to play their first play before himself and the aldermen and common council of the city; and that is called the mayor's play, where every one that will comes in without money, the mayor giving the players a reward as he thinks fit, to show respect unto them. At such a play my father took me with him, and made me stand between his legs, as he sat upon one of the benches, where we saw and heard very well. The play was called 'The Cradle of Security,' wherein was personated a king or some great prince, with his courtiers of several kinds, amongst which three ladies were in special grace with him, and they, keeping him in delight and pleasures, drew him from his graver counsellors, hearing of sermons, and listening to good counsel and admonitions, that in the end they got him to lie down in a cradle upon the stage, where these three ladies, joining in a sweet song, rocked him asleep, that he snorted again, and in the mean time closely conveyed under the clothes wherewithal he was covered a vizard like a swine's snout upon his face, with three wire chains fastened thereunto, the other end whereof being holden severally by those three ladies, who fall to singing again, and then discovered his face, that the spectator might see how they had transformed him going on with their singing. Whilst all this was acting, there came forth of another door at the farthest end of the stage two old men, the one in blue, with a sergeant-at-arms his mace on his shoulder, the other in red, with a drawn sword in his hand, and leaning with the other hand upon the other's shoulder, and so they two went along in a soft pace, round about by the skirt of the stage, till at last they came to the cradle, when all the

court was in greatest jollity, and then the foremost old man with his mace stroke a fearful blow upon the cradle, whereat all the courtiers, with the three ladies and the vizard, all vanished; and the desolate prince, starting up barefaced, and finding himself thus sent for to judgment, made a lamentable complaint of his miserable case, and so was carried away by wicked spirits. This prince did personate in the moral the wicked of the world; the three ladies, pride, covetousness, and luxury; the two old men the end of the world and the last judgment. This sight took such impres-

sion in me, that when I came towards man's estate it was as fresh in my memory as if I had seen it newly acted."

It would appear from Willis's description that 'The Cradle of Security' was for the most part dumb show. It is probable that he was present at its performance at Gloucester when he was six or seven years of age. It evidently belongs to that class of moral plays which were of the simplest construction. And yet it was popular long after the English drama had reached its highest eminence.

CHAPTER III.

ITINERANT PLAYERS.

IN a later period of the stage, when the actors chiefly depended upon the large support of the public, instead of receiving the wages of noblemen, however wealthy and powerful, the connection of a company of players with a great personage, whose "servants" they were called, was scarcely more than a licence to act without the interference of the magistrate. But, in the period of the stage which we are now describing, it would appear that the players were literally the retainers of powerful lords, who employed them for their own recreation, and allowed them to derive a profit from occasional public exhibitions. In 'The Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres' we have the following passage, which appears decisive upon this point:—"What credit can return to the nobleman to countenance his men to exercise that quality which is not sufferable in any commonweal? Whereas, it was an ancient custom that no man of honour should retain any man but such as was as excellent in some one good quality or another, whereby, if occasion so served, he might get his own living. Then was every nobleman's house a commonweal in itself. But since the retaining of these caterpillars the credit of noble-

men hath decayed, and they are thought to be covetous by permitting their servants, which cannot live by themselves, and whom for nearness they will not maintain, to live on the devotion or alms of other men, passing from country to country, from one gentleman's house to another, offering their service, which is a kind of beggary. Who, indeed, to speak more truly, are become beggars for their servants. For commonly the good-will men bear to their lords makes them draw the strings of their purses to extend their liberality to them, where otherwise they would not." Speaking of the writers of plays, the same author adds,—“But some perhaps will say the nobleman delighteth in such things, whose humours must be contented, partly for fear and partly for commodity; and if they write matters pleasant they are best preferred in Court among the cunning heads.” In the old play of 'The Taming of a Shrew' the players in the 'Induction' are presented to us in very homely guise. The messenger tells the lord—

“Your players be come,
And do attend your honour's pleasure here.”

The stage-direction then says, “Enter two

of the players with *packs at their backs*, and a boy." To the question of the lord,—

"Now, sirs, what store of plays have you?"—the Clown answers, "Marry, my lord, you may have a tragical or a commodity, or what you will;" for which ignorance the other player rebukes the Clown, saying, "A comedy, thou shouldst say: zounds! thou 'lt shame us all." Whether this picture belongs to an earlier period of the stage than the similar scene in Shakspeare's 'Induction,' or whether Shakspeare was familiar with a better order of players, it is clear that in his scene the players appear as persons of somewhat more importance, and are treated with more respect:—

"Lord. Sirrah, go see what trumpet 't is that sounds:

Belike, some noble gentleman, that means, Travelling some journey, to repose him here.

Re-enter a Servant.

How now? who is it?

Serv. An it please your honour, Players, that offer service to your lordship.

Lord. Bid them come near.

Enter Players.

Now, fellows, you are welcome.

Players. We thank your honour.

Lord. Do you intend to stay with me to-night?

2 Play. So please your lordship to accept our duty.

Lord. With all my heart."

The lord, however, even in this scene, gives his order, "Take them to the buttry,"—a proof that the itinerant companies were classed little above menials.

Of the performances of an itinerant company at this period we will select an example of "Comedy."

'A Pleasant Comedie called Common Conditions' is neither a Mystery nor a Moral Play. It dispenses with impersonations of Good and Evil; Iniquity holds no controversy with Charity, and the Devil is not brought in to buffet or to be buffeted. The play is written in rhymed verse, and very ambitiously written. The matter is "set out with sweetness of words, fitness of epithets, with metaphors, allegories, hy-

perboles, amphibologies, similitude."* It is a dramatized romance, of which the title expresses that it represents a possible aspect of human life; and the name of the chief character, Common Conditions, from which the play derives its title, would import that he does not belong to the supernatural or allegorical class of personages. Mr. Collier, in his 'History of Dramatic Poetry,' expresses an opinion that the character of Common Conditions is the *Vice* of the performance. It appears to us, on the contrary, that the ordinary craft of a cunning knave—a little, restless, tricky servant—works out all the action, in the same way that the *Vice* had formerly interfered with it in the moral plays; but that he is essentially and purposely distinguished from the *Vice*. Mr. Collier also calls this play merely an interlude: it appears to us in its *outward form* to be as much a comedy as the 'Winter's Tale.'

Three tinkers appear upon the stage, singing,

"Hey tisty toisty, tinkers good fellows they be;
In stopping of one hole, they used to make three."

These worthies are called Drift, Unthrift, and Shift; and, trade being bad with them, they agree to better it by a little robbing. Unthrift tells his companions,

"But, masters, wot ye what? I have heard news about the court this day,

That there is a gentleman with a lady gone away;

And have with them a little parasite full of money and coin."

These travellers the tinkers agree to rob; and we have here an example of the readiness of the stage to indulge in satire. The purveyors who, a few years later, were denounced in Parliament, are, we suppose, here pointed at. Shift says,

"We will take away their purses, and say we do it by *commission*;"

to which Drift replies,

"Who made a *commissioner* of you?

If thou make no better answer at the bar, thou wilt hang, I tell thee true."

* Gosson. 'Plays Confuted,' second action.

The gentleman and lady from the court, Sedmond and Clarisia, then come out of the wood, accompanied by their servant, Conditions. It appears that their father has long been absent, and they are travelling to seek him. Clarisia is heavy-hearted; and her brother thus consoles her, after the fashion of "epithets, metaphors, and hyperboles :"—

"You see the chirping birds begin you melody to make,
But you, ungrateful unto them, their pleasant voice forsake:
You see the nightingale also, with sweet and pleasant lay,
Sound forth her voice in chirping wise to banish care away.
You see Dame Tellus, she with mantle fresh and green,
For to display everywhere most comely to be seen;
You see Dame Flora, she with flowers fresh and gay,
Both here and there and everywhere, her banners to display."

The lady will have no comfort. She replies to her brother in a long echo to his speech, ending—

"And therefore, brother, leave off talk; in vain you seem to prate:
Not all the talk you utter can, my sorrows can abate."

Conditions ungallantly takes part against the lady, by a declamation in dispraise of women; which is happily cut short by the tinkers rushing in. Now indeed we have movement which will stir the audience. The brother escapes; the lady is bound to a tree; Conditions is to be hanged; but his adroitness, which is excessively diverting, altogether reminding one of another little knave, the Flibbertigibbet of Scott, sets the audience in a roar. They are realizing the description of Gosson,—“In the theatres they generally take up a wonderful laughter, and shout altogether with one voice when they see some notable cozenage practised.”* When the tinkers have the noose round the neck of Conditions, he persuades them to let him

* ‘Plays Confuted,’ &c.

hang himself, and to help him up in the tree to accomplish his determination. They consent, arguing that if he hangs himself they shall be free from the penalty of hanging him; and so into the tree he goes. Up the branches he runs like a squirrel, hallooing for help, whilst the heavy tinkers have no chance against his activity and his Sheffield knife. They finally make off; and Conditions releases his mistress. The next scene presents us Sedmond, the brother, alone. He laments the separation from his sister, and the uncertainty which he has of ever finding his father:

"But farewell now, my coursers brave, attrapped to the ground;
Farewell, adieu, all pleasures eke, with comely hawk and hound:
Farewell, ye nobles all; farewell each martial knight;
Farewell, ye famous ladies all, in whom I did delight."

Sedmond, continuing his lament, says,—

"Adieu, my native soil; adieu, Arbaccas king;
Adieu, each wight and martial knight; adieu, each living thing:
Adieu, my woful sire, and sister in like case,
Whom never I shall see again each other to embrace;
For now I will betake myself a wandering knight to be,
Into some strange and foreign land, their comeliness to see."

When Conditions released the lady, we learnt that the scene was Arabia:—

"And, lady, it is not best for us in Arabia longer to tarry."

It is to Arabia, his native soil, that Sedmond bids adieu. But the audience learn by a very simple expedient that a change is to take place: a board is stuck up with the word "Phrygia" upon it, and a new character, Galiarbus, entereth "out of Phrygia." He is the father of the fugitives, who, banished from Arabia, has become rich, and obtained a lordship from the Duke of Phrygia; but he thinks of his children, and bitterly laments that they must never meet. Those children have arrived in Phrygia; for a new character appears, Lamphedon, the son of the Duke,

who has fallen violently in love with a lady whom we know by his description to be Clarisia. Conditions has discovered that his mistress is equally in love with Lamphedon; all which circumstances are described and not rendered dramatic: and then Conditions, for his own advantage, brings the two lovers together, and they plight their troth, and are finally married. The lost brother, Sedmond, next makes his appearance under the name of Nomides; and with him a Phrygian lady, Sabia, has fallen in love. But her love is unrequited; she is rejected, and the uncourteous knight flies from her. Lamphedon and Clarisia are happy at the Duke's court; but Conditions, as it obscurely appears, wanting to be travelling again, has irritated the Duchess against her daughter-in-law, and they both, accompanied by Conditions, fly to take ship for Thracia. They fall in with pirates, who receive them on ship-board, having been secretly promised by Conditions that they will afford a good booty. We soon learn, by the appearance of Lamphedon, that they have thrown him overboard, and that he has lost his lady; but the pirates, who are by no means bad specimens of the English mariner, soon present themselves again, with a song, which we transcribe; for assuredly it was fitted to rejoice the hearts of the players of a maritime nation:—

"Lustily, lustily, lustily, let us sail forth;
The wind trim doth serve us, it blows from
the north.

All things we have ready and nothing we want
To furnish our ship that rideth hereby;
Victuals and weapons they be nothing scant;
Like worthy mariners ourselves we will try.
Lustily, lustily, &c.

Her flags be new trimmed, set flaunting aloft;
Our ship for swift swimming, oh, she doth
excel:

We fear no enemies, we have escaped them oft:
Of all ships that swimmeth, she beareth the
bell.

Lustily, lustily, &c.

And here is a master excelleth in skill,
And our master's mate he is not to seek;
And here is a boatswain will do his good will,
And here is a ship, boy, we never had leak.
Lustily, lustily, &c.

If Fortune then fail not, and our next voyage
prove,

We will return merrily and make good cheer,
And hold altogether as friends link'd in love;
The cans shall be filled with wine, ale, and
beer.

Lustily, lustily," &c.

The action of this comedy is conducted for the most part by description; an easier thing than the dramatic development of plot and character. Lamphedon falls in with the pirates, and by force of arms he compels them to tell him of the fate of his wife. She has been taken, it seems, by Conditions, to be sold to Cardolus, an island chief; and then Lamphedon goes to fight Cardolus, and he does fight him, but finds not the lady. Conditions has however got rid of his charge, by persuading her to assume the name of Metræa, and enter the service of Leosthines. Hardship must have wonderfully changed her; for after a time her brother, Sedmond, arrives under his assumed name, and becomes a candidate for her affections. The good old man under whose protection she remains has adopted her as his daughter. Lamphedon is on the way to seek her, accompanied by Conditions; and thus by accident, and by the intrigues of the knavish servant, all those are reunited who have suffered in separation: for Leosthines is the banished father*. How Conditions is disposed of is not so clear. He is constantly calling himself a little knave, and a crafty knave, a parasite, a turncoat; and he says,

"Conditions? nay, double Conditions is my
name,
That for my own advantage such dealings can
frame."

It is difficult to discover what advantage he derives from his trickiness, yet he has always a new trick. It is probable that he was personated by some diminutive performer, whose grimaces and ugliness would make the audience roar with delight. The tinkers in the first scene say they know not what to do with him, except to "set him to keep crows." The object of the writer of the

* A leaf or two is lost of the original copy, but enough remains to let us see how the plot will end. We learn that Nomides repents of his rejection of Sabia.

comedy, if he had any object, would appear to be to show that the purposes of craft may produce results entirely unexpected by the crafty one, and that happiness may be finally obtained through the circumstances which appear most to impede its attainment. This comedy is remarkable for containing none of the ribaldry which was so properly objected to in the plays of the early stage. It is characterised, also, by the absence of that melodramatic extravagance which belonged to this period, exhibiting power, indeed, but not the power of real art. These extravagances are well described by the author of 'The Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theatres;' although his notion that an effort of imagination, and a lie, are the same thing is very characteristic:—"The writers of our time are so led away with vain glory that their only endeavour is to pleasure the humour of men, and rather with vanity to content their minds than to profit them with good ensample. The notablest liar is become the best poet; he that can make the most notorious lie, and disguise falsehood in such sort that he may pass unperceived, is held the best writer. For the strangest comedy brings greatest delectation and pleasure. Our nation is led away with vanity, which the author perceiving, frames himself with novelties and strange trifles to content the vain humours of his rude auditors, feigning countries never heard of, monsters and prodigious creatures that are not: as of the Arimaspie, of the Grips, the Pigmies, the Cranes, and other such notorious lies." Sidney, writing of the same period of the drama, speaks of the apparition of "a hideous monster with fire and smoke."* And Gosson, having direct reference to some romantic

* 'Defence of Poesy.'

dramas formed upon romances and legendary tales, as 'Common Conditions' was, says, "Sometimes you shall see nothing but the adventures of an amorous knight, passing from country to country for the love of his lady, encountering many a terrible monster made of brown paper; and at his return is so wonderfully changed, that he cannot be known but by some posy in his tablet, or by a broken ring, or a handkerchief, or a piece of cockle-shell."† When the true masters of the romantic drama arose, they found the people prepared for the transformation of the ridiculous into the poetical. We have analysed this very curious comedy from the transcript in the Bodleian Library made under the direction of Malone from the only printed copy, and that an imperfect one, which is supposed to exist. In the page which contains the passage "Farewell, ye nobles all," &c., Malone has inserted the following foot-note, after quoting the celebrated lines in Othello, "Farewell the tranquil mind," &c.:—"The coincidence is so striking that one is almost tempted to think that Shakspeare had read this wretched piece." It is scarcely necessary for us to point out how constantly the date of a play must be borne in mind to allow us to form any fair opinion of its merits. Malone himself considers that this play was printed about the year 1570, although we believe that this conjecture fixes the date at least ten years too early. It appears to us that it is a remarkable production even for 1580; and if, as a work of art, it be of little worth, it certainly contains the elements of the romantic drama, except the true poetical element, which could only be the result of extraordinary individual genius.

† 'Plays Confuted.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAWFULNESS OF PLAYS.

THE controversy upon the lawfulness of stage-plays was a remarkable feature of the period which we are now describing; and pamphlets were to that age what newspapers are to ours. The dispute about the Theatre was a contest between the holders of opposite opinions in religion. The Puritans, who even at that time were strong in their zeal if not in their numbers, made the Theatre the especial object of their indignation; for its unquestionable abuses allowed them so to frame their invectives that they might tell with double force against every description of public amusement, against poetry in general, against music, against dancing, associated as they were with the excesses of an ill-regulated stage. A Treatise of John Northbrooke, licensed for the press in 1577, is directed against "dicing, dancing, vain plays, or interludes." Gosson, who had been a student of Christchurch, Oxford, had himself written two or three plays previous to his publication, in 1579, of 'The School of Abuse, containing a Pleasant Invective against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters, and such-like Caterpillars of a Commonwealth.' This book, written with considerable ostentation of learning, and indeed with no common vigour and occasional eloquence, defeats its own purposes by too large an aim. Poets, whatever be the character of their poetry, are the objects of Gosson's new-born hostility:—"Tiberius the Emperor saw somewhat when he judged Scaurus to death for writing a tragedy; Augustus when he banished Ovid; and Nero when he charged Lucan to put up his pipes, to stay his pen, and write no more." Music comes in for the same denunciation, upon the authority of Pythagoras, who "condemns them for fools that judge music by sound and ear." The three abuses of the time are held to be inseparable:—"As poetry and piping are cousin-germans, so piping and playing are of great affinity, and all three chained in links of abuse." It is not to be

thought that declamation like this would produce any great effect in turning a poetical mind from poetry, or that even Master Gosson's contrast of the "manners of England in old time" and "New England," would go far to move a patriotic indignation against modern refinements. We have, on one hand, Dion's description how Englishmen "went naked and were good soldiers; they fed upon roots and barks of trees; they would stand up to the chin many days in marshes without victuals;" and, on the other hand, "but the exercise that is now among us is banqueting, playing, piping, and dancing, and all such delights as may win us to pleasure, or rock us in sleep. *Quantum mutatus ab illo!*" In this his first tract the worthy man has a sneaking kindness for the Theatre which he can with difficulty suppress:—"As some of the players are far from abuse, so some of their plays are without rebuke, which are easily remembered, as quickly reckoned. The two prose books played at the Bel Savage, where you shall find never a word without wit, never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vain. 'The Jew,' and 'Ptolemy,' shown at the Bull; the one representing the greediness of worldly choosers, and bloody minds of usurers; the other very lively describing how seditious estates with their own devices, false friends with their own swords, and rebellious commons in their own snares, are overthrown; neither with amorous gesture wounding the eye, nor with slovenly talk hurting the ears, of the chaste hearers. 'The Blacksmith's Daughter,' and 'Catiline's Conspiracies,' usually brought in at the Theatre: the first containing the treachery of Turks, the honourable bounty of a noble mind, the shining of virtue in distress. The last, because it is known to be a pig of mine own sow, I will speak the less of it; only giving you to understand that the whole mark which I shot at in that work was to show the reward of

traitors in Catiline, and the necessary government of learned men in the person of Cicero, which foresees every danger that is likely to happen, and forestalls it continually ere it take effect."

The praise of the "two prose books at the Bel Savage," that contained "never a word without wit, never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vain," is quite sufficient to show us that these prose books exhibited neither character nor passion. The 'Ptolemy' and the 'Catiline,' there can be no doubt, were composed of a succession of tedious monologues, having nothing of the principle of dramatic art in them, although in their outward form they appeared to be dramas. Gosson says, "These plays are good plays and sweet plays, and of all plays the best plays, and most to be liked, worthy to be sung of the Muses, or set out with the cunning of Roscius himself; *yet are they not fit for every man's diet, neither ought they commonly to be shown.*" It is clear that these good plays and sweet plays had not in themselves any of the elements of popularity; *therefore* they were utterly barren of real poetry. The highest poetry is essentially the popular poetry: it is universal in its range, it is unlimited in its duration. The lowest poetry (if poetry it can be called) is conventional; it lives for a little while in narrow corners, the pet thing of fashion or of pedantry. When Gosson wrote, the poetry of the English drama was not yet born; and the people contented themselves with something else that was nearer poetry than the plays which were "not fit for every man's diet." Gosson, in his second tract, which, provoked by the answer of Lodge to his 'School of Abuse,' is written with much more virulence against plays especially, thus describes what the people most delighted in: "As the devil hath brought in all that Poetry can sing, so hath he sought out every strain that Music is able to pipe, and drawn all kinds of instruments into that compass, simple and mixed. For the eye, beside the beauty of the houses and the stages, he sendeth in garish apparel, masks, vaulting, tumbling, dancing of jigs, galliards, moriscos, hobby-horses, showing of juggling casts; no-

thing forgot that might serve to set out the matter with pomp, or ravish the beholders with variety of pleasure." Lodge, in his reply to Gosson's 'School of Abuse,' had indirectly acknowledged the want of moral purpose in the stage exhibitions; but he contends that, as the ancient satirists were reformers of manners, so might plays be properly directed to the same end. "Surely we want not a Roscius, neither are there great scarcity of Terence's profession: but yet our men dare not nowadays presume so much as the old poets might: *and therefore they apply their writings to the people's vein;* whereas, if in the beginning they had ruled, we should nowadays have found small spectacles of folly, but of truth. . . . You say, unless the thing be taken away, the vice will continue; nay, I say, *if the style were changed,* the practice would profit." To this argument, that the Theatre might become the censor of manners, Gosson thus replies: "If the common people which resort to theatres, being but an assembly of tailors, tinkers, cordwainers, sailors, old men, young men, women, boys, girls, and such-like, be the judges of faults there pointed out, the rebuking of manners in that place is neither lawful nor convenient, but to be held for a kind of libelling and defaming." The notion which appears to have possessed the minds of the writers against the stage at this period is, that a fiction and a lie were the same. Gosson says, "The perfectest image is that which maketh the thing to seem neither greater nor less than indeed it is; but, in plays, either the things are feigned that never were, as Cupid and Psyche played at Paul's, and a great many comedies more at the Blackfriars, and in every playhouse in London, which, for brevity sake, I overskip; or, if a true history be taken in hand, it is made like our shadows, longest at the rising and fall of the sun; shortest of all at high noon."

It has scarcely, we think, been noticed that the justly celebrated work of Sir Philip Sidney forms an important part of the controversy, not only against the Stage, but against Poetry and Music, that appears to have commenced in England a little previous to 1580.

Gosson, as we have seen, attacks the Stage, not only for its especial abuses, but because it partakes of the general infamy of Poetry. According to this declaimer, it is "the whole practice of poets, either with fables to show their abuses, or with plain terms to unfold their mischief, discover their shame, discredit themselves, and disperse their poison throughout the world." Gosson dedicated his 'School of Abuse' to Sidney; and Spenser, in one of his letters to Gabriel Harvey, shows how Sidney received the compliment:—"New books I hear of none: but only of one that, writing a certain book called 'The School of Abuse,' and dedicating it to Master Sidney, was for his labour scorned; if, at least, it be in the goodness of that nature to scorn. Such folly is it not to regard aforehand *the inclination* and quality of him to whom we dedicate our books." We have no doubt that the 'Defence of Poesy,' or, as it was first called, 'An Apology for Poetry,' was intended as a reply to the dedicator. There is every reason to believe that it was written in 1581. Sidney can scarcely avoid pointing at Gosson when he speaks of the "Poet-haters" as of "people who seek a praise by dispraising others," that they "do prodigally spend a great many wandering words in quips and scoffs, carping and taunting at each thing which, by stirring the spleen, may stay the brain from a thorough beholding the worthiness of the subject." We have seen how the early fanatical writers against the stage held that a Poet and a Liar were synonymous. To this ignorant invective, calculated for the lowest understandings, Sidney gives a brief and direct answer:—"That they should be the principal liars, I answer paradoxically, but truly, I think truly, that, of all writers under the sun, the poet is the least liar, and, though he would, as a poet can scarcely be a liar. The astronomer, with his cousin the geometrician, can hardly escape when they take upon them to measure the height of the stars. How often, think you, do the physicians lie, when they aver things good for sicknesses, which afterwards send Charon a great number of souls drowned in a potion before they come to his ferry? And no less of the rest which take upon them to affirm:

Now for the poet, he nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth; for, as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false: So as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies: But the poet, as I said before, never affirmeth, the poet never maketh any circles about your imagination to conjure you to believe for true what he writeth: He citeth not authorities of other histories, but even for his entry calleth the sweet Muses to aspire unto him a good invention: In troth, not labouring to tell you what is or is not, but what should or should not be. And therefore, though he recount things not true, yet, because he telleth them not for true, he lieth not, unless we will say that Nathan lied in his speech, before alleged, to David; which as a wicked man durst scarce say, so think I none so simple would say that Æsop lied in the tales of his beasts; for who thinketh that Æsop wrote it for actually true were well worthy to have his name chronicled among the beasts he writeth of. What child is there that, coming to a play and seeing 'Thebes' written in great letters upon an old door, doth believe that it is Thebes? If then a man can arrive to the child's age, to know that the poet's persons and doings are but pictures what should be, and not stories what have been, they will never give the lie to things not affirmatively, but allegorically and figuratively, written; and therefore, as in history, looking for truth, they may go away full fraught with falsehood, so in poesy, looking but for fiction, they shall use the narration but as an imaginative ground-plot of a profitable invention."

The notion of Sidney's time evidently was, that nothing ought to be presented upon the stage but what was an historical fact; that *all* the points belonging to such a history should be given; and that no art should be used in setting it forth beyond that necessary to give the audience, not to make them comprehend, all the facts. It is quite clear that such a process will present us little of the poetry or the philosophy of history. The play-writers of 1580, weak masters as they were, knew their art better than Gosson;

they made history attractive by changing it into a melo-drama:—"The poets drive it (a true history) most commonly unto such points as may best show the majesty of their pen in tragical speeches, or set the heroes agog with discourses of love, or paint a few antics to fit their own humours with scoffs and taunts, or bring in a show to furnish the stage when it is bare. When the matter of itself comes short of this, they follow the practice of the cobbler, and set their teeth to the leather to pull it out. So was the history of 'Cæsar and Pompey,' and the play of 'The Fabii,' at the theatre both amplified there where the drums might walk or the pen ruffle. When the history swelled or ran too high for the number of the persons who should play it, the poet with Proteus cut the same to his own measure: when it afforded no pomp at all, he brought it to the rack to make it serve. Which invincibly proveth on my side that plays are no images of truth." The author of 'The Blast of Retreat,' who describes himself as formerly "a great affecter of that vain art of play-making," charges the authors of historical plays not only with expanding and curtailing the action, so as to render them no images of truth, but with changing the historical facts altogether:—"If they write of histories that are known, as the life of Pompey, the martial affairs of Cæsar, and other worthies, they give them a new face, and turn them out like counterfeits to show themselves on the stage." From the author of 'The Blast of Retreat' we derive the most accurate account of those comedies of intrigue of which none have come down to us from this early period of the drama. We might fancy he was describing the productions of Mrs. Behn or Mrs. Centlivre, in sentences that might appear to be quoted from Jeremy Collier's attacks upon the stage more than a century later:—"Some, by taking pity upon the deceitful tears of the stage-lovers, have been moved by their complaint to rue on their

secret friends, whom they have thought to have tasted like torment: some, having noted the ensamples how maidens restrained from the marriage of those whom their friends have misliked, have there learned a policy to prevent their parents by stealing them away: some, seeing by ensample of the stage-player one carried with too much liking of another man's wife, having noted by what practice she has been assailed and overtaken, have not failed to put the like in effect in earnest that was afore shown in jest. . . . The device of carrying and recarrying letters by laundresses, practising with pedlars to transport their tokens by colourable means to sell their merchandise, and other kind of policies to beguile fathers of their children, husbands of their wives, guardians of their wards, and masters of their servants, is it not aptly taught in 'The School of Abuse?'"* Perhaps the worst abuse of the stage of this period was the licence of the clown or fool—an abuse which the greatest and the most successful of dramatic writers found it essential to denounce and put down. The author of 'The Blast of Retreat' has described this vividly:—"And all be [although] these pastimes were not, as they are, to be condemned simply of their own nature, yet because they are so abused they are abominable. For the Fool no sooner showeth himself in his colours, to make men merry, but straightway lightly there followeth some vanity, not only superfluous, but beastly and wicked. Yet we, so carried away by his unseemly gesture and unreverenced scorning, that we seem only to be delighted in him, and are not content to sport ourselves with modest mirth, as the matter gives occasion, unless it be intermixed with knavery, drunken merriments, crafty connings, undecent jugglings, clownish conceits, and such other cursed mirth, as is both odious in the sight of God, and offensive to honest ears."

* The editor of the tract appends a note:—"He meaneth plays, who are not unfitly so called."

CHAPTER V.

THE EARLIEST HISTORICAL DRAMA.

WHEN the ancient pageants and mysteries had been put down by the force of public opinion,—when spectacles of a dramatic character had ceased to be employed as instruments of religious instruction,—the professional players who had sprung up founded their popularity for a long period upon the old habits and associations of the people. Our drama was essentially formed by a course of steady progress, and not by rapid transition. We are accustomed to say that the drama was created by Shakspeare, Marlow, Greene, Kyd, and a few others of distinguished genius; but they all of them worked upon a rough foundation which was ready for them. The superstructure of real tragedy and comedy had to be erected upon the moral plays, the romances, the histories, which were beginning to be popular in the very first days of Queen Elizabeth, and continued to be so, even in their very rude forms, beyond the close of her long reign.

In the controversial writers who, about 1580, attacked and defended the early Stage, we find no direct mention of those Histories, “borrowed out of our English Chronicles, wherein our forefathers’ valiant acts, that have been long buried in rusty brass and worm-eaten books, are revived, and they themselves raised from the grave of oblivion, and brought to plead their aged honours in open presence.” This is a description of the early Chronicle Histories of the stage, as given by Thomas Nashe, in 1592. Nashe goes on to say:—“In plays, all cosenages, all cunning drifts, over-gilded with outward holiness, all stratagems of war, all the canker-worms that breed in the rust of peace, are most lively anatomised. They show the ill success of treason, the fall of hasty climbers, the wretched end of usurpers, the misery of civil dissention, and how just God is evermore in punishing murder. And to prove every one of these allegations could I propound the circumstances of *this play and*

that.” In the same pamphlet Nashe describes the plays to the performance of which “in the afternoon” resorted “men that are their own masters, as gentlemen of the court, the inns of court, and the number of captains and soldiers about London.” To this audience, then,—not the rudest or least refined, however idle and dissipated,—the representation of some series of events connected with the history of their country had a charm which, according to Nashe, was to divert them from grosser excitements. In another passage the same writer says, “What a glorious thing it is to have King Henry V. represented on the stage leading the French king prisoner, and forcing both him and the Dauphin to swear fealty.” Something like this dramatic action is to be found in one of those elder historical plays which have come down to us, ‘The Famous Victories of Henry V., containing the Honourable Battle of Agincourt.’ Nothing can be ruder or more inartificial than the dramatic conduct of ‘The Famous Victories:’ nothing grosser than the taste of many of its dialogues. The old Coventry play of ‘Hock Tuesday,’ exhibited before Queen Elizabeth in Kenilworth Castle, in 1575, did not more essentially differ in the conduct of its action from the structure of a regular historical drama, than such a play as ‘The Famous Victories’ differed, in all that constitutes dramatic beauty and propriety, from the almost contemporary histories of Marlow and Shakspeare. To understand what Shakspeare especially did for English History, we may well bestow a little study upon this extraordinary composition.

‘The Famous Victories’ is a regal story; its scenes changing from the tavern to the palace, from England to France; now exhibiting the wild Prince striking the representative of his father on the seat of justice, and then, after a little while, the same Prince a hero and a conqueror. A raised floor furnishes ample room for all these dis-

plays. A painted board leads the imagination of the audience from one country to another; and when the honourable battle of Agincourt is to be fought, "two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field?" (Sidney—'Defence of Poesy.') The curtain is removed, and without preparation we encounter the Prince in the midst of his profligacy. Ned and Tom are his companions; and when the Prince says, "Think you not that it was a villainous part of me to rob my father's receivers?" Ned very charitably answers, "Why no, my lord, it was but a trick of youth." Sir John Oldcastle, who passes by the familiar name of Jockey, joins this pleasant company, and he informs the Prince that the town of Deptford has risen with hue and cry after the Prince's man who has robbed a poor carrier. The accomplished Prince then meets with the receivers whom he has robbed; and, after bestowing upon them the names of villains and rascals, he drives them off with a threat that if they say a word about the robbery he will have them hanged. With their booty, then, will they go to the tavern in Eastcheap, upon the invitation of the Prince:—"We are all fellows, I tell you, sirs; an the king my father were dead, we would be all kings." The scene is now London, with John Cobbler, Robin Pewterer, and Lawrence Costermonger keeping watch and ward in the accustomed style of going to sleep. There is short rest for them; for Derrick, the carrier who has been robbed by the Prince's servant, is come to London to seek his goods. Tarleton, the famous Clown, plays the Kentish carrier. It matters little what the author of the play has written down for him, for his "wondrous plentiful pleasant extemporal wit" will do much better for the amusement of his audience than the dull dialogue of the prompt-books. In the scene before us he has to catch the thief, and to take him before the Lord Chief Justice; and when the Court is set in order, and the Chief Justice cries, "Gaoler, bring the prisoner to the bar," Derrick speaks according to the book,—"Hear you, my lord, I pray you bring the

bar to the prisoner;" but what he adds, having this hint for a clown's licence, soon renders the Chief Justice a very insignificant personage. The real wit of Tarleton probably did much to render the dullness of the early stage endurable by persons of any refinement. Henry Chettle, in his curious production, 'Kind-Hartes Dreame,' written about four years after Tarleton's death, thus describes his appearance in a vision;—"The next, by his suit of russet, his buttoned cap, his tabor, his standing on the toe, and other tricks, I knew to be either the body or resemblance of Tarleton, who, living, for his pleasant conceits was of all men liked, and, dying, for mirth left not his fellow." The Prince enters and demands the release of his servant, which the Chief Justice refuses. The scene which ensues when the Prince strikes the Chief Justice is a remarkable example of the poetical poverty of the early stage. In the representation, the action would of course be exciting, but the dialogue which accompanies it is beyond comparison bald and meaningless. The audience was, however, compensated by Tarleton's iteration of the scene:—"Faith, John, I'll tell thee what: thou shalt be my lord chief justice, and thou shalt sit in the chair; and I'll be the young prince, and hit thee a box on the ear; and then thou shalt say, To teach you what prerogatives mean, I commit you to the Fleet." The Prince is next presented really in prison, where he is visited by Sir John Oldcastle. The Prince, in his dialogue with Jockey, Ned, and Tom, again exhibits himself as the basest and most vulgar of ruffians; but, hearing his father is sick, he goes to Court, and the bully, in the twinkling of an eye, becomes a saintly hypocrite:—"Pardon me, sweet father, pardon me: good my lord of Exeter, speak for me; pardon me, pardon, good father: not a word: ah, he will not speak one word: ah, Harry, now thrice unhappy Harry. But what shall I do? I will go take me into some solitary place, and there lament my sinful life, and, when I have done, I will lay me down and die". The scene where the Prince removes the crown possesses a higher interest, when we recollect the great parallel

scene of Shakspeare's Henry IV. Part II., beginning

"I never thought to hear you speak again."

'The Famous Victories' was printed in 1594. In that copy much of the prose is chopped up into lines of various lengths, in order to look like some kind of measure:—

Hen. V. Most sovereign lord, and well-beloved father,
I came into your chamber to comfort the melancholy
Soul of your body, and finding you at that time
Past all recovery, and dead to my thinking,
God is my witness, and what should I do,
But with weeping tears lament the death of you,
my father;
And after that, seeing the crown, I took it.
And tell me, my father, who might better take it than I,
After your death? but, seeing you live,
I most humbly render it into your majesty's hands,
And the happiest man alive that my father lives;
And live my lord and father for ever!

Hen. IV. Stand up, my son;
Thine answer hath sounded well in mine ears,
For I must needs confess that I was in a very sound sleep,
And altogether unmindful of thy coming:
But come near, my son,
And let me put thee in possession whilst I live,
That none deprive thee of it after my death.

Hen. V. Well may I take it at your majesty's hands,
But it shall never touch my head so long as my father lives. [*He taketh the crown.*]

Hen. IV. God give thee joy, my son;
God bless thee and make thee his servant,
And send thee a prosperous reign;
For God knows, my son, how hardly I came by it,
And how hardly I have maintained it.

Hen. V. Howsoever you came by it I know not;
And now I have it from you, and from you I will keep it:
And he that seeks to take the crown from my head,
Let him look that his armour be thicker than mine,
Or I will pierce him to the heart,
Were it harder than brass or bullion.

Hen. IV. Nobly spoken, and like a king.

Now trust me, my lords, I fear not but my son
Will be as warlike and victorious a prince
As ever reigned in England."

Henry IV. dies; Henry V. is crowned; the evil companions are cast off; the Chief Justice is forgiven; and the expedition to France is resolved upon. To trace the course of the war would be too much for the patience of our readers. The clashing of the four swords and bucklers might have rendered its stage representation endurable.

'The True Tragedy of Richard III.' is the only other History, of which we possess a printed copy, that we can assign to the period before the first real dramatists. This old play is a work of higher pretension than 'The Famous Victories.' Like that play, it contains many prose speeches which are printed to have some resemblance to measured lines; but, on the other hand, there are many passages of legitimate verse which are run together as prose. The most ambitious part of the whole performance is a speech of Richard before the battle: and this we transcribe:—

"*King.* The hell of life that hangs upon the crown,

The daily cares, the nightly dreams,
The wretched crews, the treason of the foe,
And horror of my bloody practice past,
Strikes such a terror to my wounded conscience,
That, sleep I, wake I, or whatsoever I do,
Methinks their ghosts come gaping for revenge
Whom I have slain in reaching for a crown.
Clarence complains and crieth for revenge;
My nephews' bloods, Revenge! revenge! doth cry;

The headless peers come pressing for revenge;
And every one cries, Let the tyrant die.
The sun by day shines hotly for revenge;
The moon by night eclipseth for revenge;
The stars are turn'd to comets for revenge;
The planets change their courses for revenge;
The birds sing not, but sorrow for revenge;
The silly lambs sit bleating for revenge;
The screeching raven sits croaking for revenge;
Whole heads of beasts come bellowing for revenge;

And all, yea, all the world, I think,
Cries for revenge, and nothing but revenge:
But to conclude, I have deserv'd revenge.
In company I dare not trust my friend;
Being alone, I dread the secret foe;

I doubt my food, lest poison lurk therein;
 My bed is uncoth, rest refrains my head.
 Then such a life I count far worse to be
 Than thousand deaths unto a damned death!
 How! was 't death, I said? who dare attempt
 my death?
 Nay, who dare so much as once to think my
 death?
 Though enemies there be that would my body
 kill,
 Yet shall they leave a never-dying mind.
 But you, villains, rebels, traitors as you are,
 How came the foe in, pressing so near?
 Where, where slept the garrison that should a
 beat them back?
 Where were our friends to intercept the foe?
 All gone, quite fled, his loyalty quite laid a-bed.
 Then vengeance, mischief, horror, with mis-
 chance,
 Wild-fire, with whirlwinds, light upon your heads,
 That thus betray'd your prince by your untruth!"

There is not a trace in the elder play of the *character* of Shakspeare's Richard:—in that play he is a coarse ruffian only—an intellectual villain. The author has not even had the skill to copy the dramatic narrative of Sir Thomas More in the scene of the arrest of Hastings. It is sufficient for him to make Richard display the brute force of the tyrant. The affected complacency, the mock passion, the bitter sarcasm of the Richard of the historian, were left for Shakspeare to imitate and improve.

Rude as is the dramatic construction, and coarse the execution, of these two relics of the period which preceded the transition state of the stage, there can be no doubt that these had their ruder predecessors,—dumb-shows, with here and there explanatory rhymes adapted to the same gross popular taste that had so long delighted in the Mysteries and Moralities which even still held a divided empire. The growing love of the people for "the storied shows," as Laneham calls the Coventry play of 'Hock Tuesday,' was the natural result of the energetic and inquiring spirit of the age. There were many who went to the theatre to be instructed. In the prologue to 'Henry VIII.' we find that this great source of the popularity of the early Histories was still active:—

"Such as give
 Their money out of hope they may believe,
 May here find truth too."

Heywood, in his 'Apology for Actors,' thus writes in 1612:—"Plays have made the ignorant more apprehensive, taught the unlearned the knowledge of many famous histories, instructed such as cannot read in the discovery of our English Chronicles: and what man have you now of that weak capacity that cannot discourse of any notable thing recorded even from William the Conqueror, nay, from the landing of Brute, until this day, being possessed of their true use?" There is a tradition reported by Gildon, (which Percy believes, though Malone pronounces it to be a fiction,) that Shakspeare, in a conversation with Ben Jonson upon the subject of his historical plays, said that, "finding the nation generally very ignorant of history, he wrote them in order to instruct the people in that particular." It is not necessary that we should credit or discredit this anecdote, to come to the conclusion that, when Shakspeare first became personally interested in providing entertainment and instruction for the people, there was a great demand already existing for that species of drama, which subsequently became important enough to constitute a class apart from Tragedy or Comedy.

The Legendary History of England was seized upon at an early period, as possessing dramatic capabilities; and in 'Ferrex and Porrex,' (sometimes called 'Gorboduc,') we have the work of two poetical minds, labouring, however, upon false principles. This drama was acted before Queen Elizabeth as early as 1562. Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, its joint author with Thomas Norton, was a man of real genius; yet the dramatic form overmastered his poetical capacity. Stately harangues stand in the place of earnest passion; rhetorical description thrusts out scenic action. Some of the lines, no doubt, are forcible and impressive,

such as those on the causes and miseries of civil war :

“ And thou, O Britain ! whilom in renown,
 Whilom in wealth and fame, shalt thus be torn,
 Dismember'd thus, and thus be rent in twain,
 Thus wasted and defac'd, spoil'd and destroy'd:
 These be the fruits your civil wars will bring.
 Hereto it comes, when kings will not consent
 To grave advice, but follow wilful will.
 This is the end, when in fond princes' hearts
 Flattery prevails, and sage rede hath no place.
 These are the plagues, when murder is the
 mean
 To make new heirs unto the royal crown.
 Thus wreak the gods, when that the mother's
 wrath
 Nought but the blood of her own child may
 'suage.

These mischiefs spring when rebels will arise,
 To work revenge, and judge their prince's fact.
 This, this ensues, when noble men do fail
 In loyal truth, and subjects will be kings.
 And this doth grow, when lo ! unto the prince,
 Whom death or sudden hap of life bereaves,
 No certain heir remains ; such certain heir
 As not all only is the rightful heir,
 But to the realm is so made known to be,
 And truth thereby vested in subjects' hearts.”

To the Legends of England belongs 'LOCRINE,' a play falsely ascribed to Shakspeare himself, and Shakspeare's own 'Lear.' The 'Lear' wholly belongs to the Tragic Drama, "the most perfect specimen of the dramatic art existing in the world." 'LOCRINE' may here claim a slight notice :—

The subject of this tragedy was a favourite with the early poets. We find it in 'The Mirror of Magistrates,' in Spenser, and in Drayton ; occupying seven stanzas of 'The Faery Queen' (Book II., Canto 10), and fifty lines of the 'Poly-Olbion.' The legend of Brutus is circumstantially related in Milton's 'History of England,' where the story of Locrine is told with the power of a poet :—

“ After this, Brutus, in a chosen place,
 builds Troja Nova, changed in time to
 Trinovantum, now London, and began to
 enact laws, Heli being then high priest in
 Judæa ; and, having governed the whole

isle twenty-four years, died, and was buried
 in his new Troy. His three sons, Locrine,
 Albanact, and Camber, divide the land by
 consent. Locrine has the middle part,
 Lœgria ; Camber possessed Cambria, or
 Wales ; Albanact, Albania, now Scotland.
 But he in the end, by Humber, king of
 the Hunns, who with a fleet invaded that
 land, was slain in fight, and his people drove
 back into Lœgria. Locrine and his brother
 go out against Humber ; who, now march-
 ing onwards, was by them defeated, and in
 a river drowned, which to this day retains
 his name. Among the spoils of his camp
 and navy were found certain young maids,
 and Estrildis above the rest, passing fair,
 the daughter of a king in Germany ; from
 whence Humber, as he went wasting the sea
 coast, had led her captive ; whom Locrine,
 though before contracted to the daughter
 of Corineus, resolves to marry. But being
 forced and threatened by Corineus, whose
 authority and power he feared, Guendolen
 the daughter he yields to marry, but in se-
 cret loves the other : and oftentimes retiring,
 as to some private sacrifice, through vaults
 and passages made under ground, and seven
 years thus enjoying her, had by her a daugh-
 ter equally fair, whose name was Sabra. But
 when once his fear was off by the death of
 Corineus, not content with secret enjoyment,
 divorcing Guendolen, he made Estrildis now
 his queen. Guendolen, all in rage, departs
 into Cornwall, where Madan, the son she
 had by Locrine, was hitherto brought up by
 Corineus, his grandfather. And gathering
 an army of her father's friends and subjects,
 gives battle to her husband by the river
 Sture ; wherein Locrine, shot with an arrow,
 ends his life. But not so ends the fury of
 Guendolen ; for Estrildis, and her daughter
 Sabra, she throws into a river ; and, to leave
 a monument of revenge, proclaims that the
 stream be thenceforth called after the dam-
 sel's name, which, by length of time, is
 changed now to Sabrina, or Severn.”

In 'Comus' Milton lingers with delight
 about the same story :—

“ There is a gentle nymph not far from hence,
 That with moist curb sways the smooth Severn
 stream,

Sabrina is her name, a virgin pure ;
 Whilome she was the daughter of Locrine,
 That had the sceptre from his father Brute.
 She, guiltless damsel, flying the mad pursuit
 Of her enraged stepdame, Guendolen,
 Commended her fair innocence to the flood,
 That stay'd her flight with his cross-flowing
 course."

The dumb-show, as it is called, of 'Locrine' is tolerably decisive as to the date of the performance. It belongs essentially to that period when the respective powers of action and of words were imperfectly understood ; when what was exhibited to the eye required to be explained, and what was conveyed to the imagination of the audience by speech was to be made more intelligible by a sign-painting pantomime. Nothing could be more characteristic of a very rude state of art, almost the rudest, than the dumb-shows which introduce each act of 'Locrine.' Act I. is thus heralded :—

"Thunder and lightning. Enter Ate in black, with a burning torch in one hand, and a bloody sword in the other. Presently let there come forth a lion running after a bear ; then come forth an archer, who must kill the lion in a dumb show, and then depart. Ate remains."

Ate then tells us, in good set verse, that a mighty lion was killed by a dreadful archer ; and the seventeen lines in which we are told this are filled with a very choice description of the lion before he was shot, and after he was shot. And what has this to do with the subject of the play ? It is an acted simile :—

"So valiant Brute, the terror of the world,
 Whose only looks did scare his enemies,
 The archer Death brought to his latest end.
 O, what may long abide above this ground,
 In state of bliss and healthful happiness?"

In the second act we have a dumb-show of Perseus and Andromeda ; in the third "a crocodile sitting on a river's bank, and a little snake stinging it ;" in the fourth Omphale and Hercules ; in the fifth Jason, Medea, and Creon's daughter. Ate, who is the great show-woman of these scenes, introduces her puppets on each occasion with a line or two of Latin, and always concludes her address with "So"—"So valiant Brute"

—"So fares it with young Locrine"—"So Humber"—"So martial Locrine"—"So Guendolen." A writer in the 'Edinburgh Review' most justly calls Locrine "a characteristic work of its time." If we were to regard these dumb-shows as the most decisive marks of its chronology, we should carry the play back to the age when the form of the moralities was in some degree indispensable to a dramatic performance ; when the action could not move and develop itself without the assistance of something approaching to the character of a chorus. Thus in 'Tancred and Gismunda,' originally acted before Queen Elizabeth in 1568, previous to the first act "Cupid cometh out of the heavens in a cradle of flowers, drawing forth upon the stage, in a blue twist of silk, from his left hand, Vain Hope, Brittle Joy ; and with a carnation twist of silk from his right hand, Fair Resemblance, Late Repentance." We have their choruses at the conclusion of other acts ; and, previous to the fourth act, not only "Megæra riseth out of hell, with the other furies," but she subsequently mixes in the main action, and throws her snake upon Tancred. Whatever period therefore we may assign to 'Locrine,' varying between the date of 'Tancred and Gismunda' and its original publication in 1594, we may be sure that the author, whoever he was, had not power enough to break through the trammels of the early stage. He had not that confidence in the force of natural action and just characterization which would allow a drama to be wholly dramatic. He wanted that high gift of imagination which conceives and produces these qualities of a drama ; and he therefore dealt as with an unimaginative audience. The same want of the dramatic power renders his play a succession of harangues, in which the last thing thought of is the appropriateness of language to situation. The first English dramatists, and those who worked upon their model, appear to have gone upon the principle that they produced the most perfect work of art when they took their art entirely out of the province of nature. The highest art is a representation of Nature in her very highest forms ; something which is above common reality,

but at the same time real. The lowest art embodies a principle opposite to nature; something purely conventional, and consequently always uninteresting, often grotesque and ridiculous. 'Locrine' furnishes abundant examples of the characteristics of a school of art which may be considered as the antithesis of the school of Shakspeare.

We hopelessly look for any close parallel of the fustian of 'Locrine' in the accredited works of Greene, or Marlowe, or Kyd, who redeemed their pedantry and their extravagance by occasional grandeur and sweetness. The dialogue from first to last is inflated beyond all comparison with any contemporary performance with which we are acquainted. Most readers are familiar with a gentleman who, when he is entreated to go down, says, "to Pluto's damned lake, to the infernal deep, with Erebus and tortures vile also." The valiant Pistol had, no doubt, diligently studied 'Locrine;' but he was a faint copyist of such sublime as the following:—

"You ugly spirits that in Cocytus mourn,
And gnash your teeth with dolorous laments;
You fearful dogs that in black Lethe howl,
And scare the ghosts with your wide-open
throats;
You ugly ghosts, that flying from these dogs
Do plunge yourselves in Puryflegethon;
Come all of you, and with your shrieking notes
Accompany the Britons' conquering host.
Come, fierce Erinnyes, horrible with snakes;
Come, ugly furies, armed with your whips;
You threefold judges of black Tartarus,
And all the army of your hellish fiends,
With new-found torments rack proud Locrine's
bones!"

The speech of Sabren, before she "commended her fair innocence to the flood," with other scattered passages here and there, afford evidence that, if the author possessed little or nothing of what may be properly called dramatic power, he might, could he have shaken off the false learning and extravagance of his school, have produced something which with proper culture might have ripened into poetry:

"You mountain nymphs which in these deserts
reign,

Cease off your hasty chase of savage beasts!
Prepare to see a heart oppress'd with care;
Address your ears to hear a mournful style!
No human strength, no work can work my
weal,
Care in my heart so tyrant-like doth deal.
You Dryades and lightfoot Satyri,
You gracious fairies, which at even-tide
Your closets leave, with heavenly beauty stor'd,
And on your shoulders spread your golden
locks;
You savage bears, in caves and darken'd dens,
Come wail with me the martial Locrine's
death;
Come mourn with me for beauteous Estrild's
death!
Ah! loving parents, little do you know
What sorrow Sabren suffers for your thrall."

According to Tieck, 'Locrine' is the earliest of Shakspeare's dramas. He has a theory that it has altogether a political tendency: "It seems to have reference to the times when England was suffering through the parties formed in favour of Mary Stuart, and to have been written before her execution, while attacks were feared at home, and invasions from abroad." It was corrected by the author, and printed, he further says, in 1595, when another Spanish invasion was feared. We confess ourselves utterly at a loss to recognise in 'Locrine' the mode in which Shakspeare usually awakens the love of country. The management in this particular is essentially different from that of 'King John' and 'Henry V.' 'Locrine' is one of the works which Tieck has translated, and his translation is no doubt a proof of the sincerity of his opinions; yet he says, frankly enough, "It bears the marks of a young poet unacquainted with the stage, who endeavours to sustain himself constantly in a posture of elevation, who purposely neglects the necessary rising and sinking of tone and effect, and who, with wonderful energy, endeavours from beginning to end to make his personages speak in the same highly-wrought and poetical language, while at the same time he shakes out all his school-learning on every possible occasion." To reduce this very just account of the play to elementary

criticism, Tieck says, first, that the action of the play is not conducted upon dramatic principles; second, that the language is not varied with the character and situation; third, that the poetry is essentially conventional, being the reflection of the author's school-learning. It must be evident to all our readers that these characteristics are the very reverse of Shakspeare. Schlegel says of 'Lochrine,' "The proofs of the genuineness of this piece are not altogether unambiguous; the grounds for doubt, on the other hand, are entitled to attention. However, this question is immediately connected with that respecting 'Titus Andronicus,' and must be at the same time resolved in the affirmative or negative." We dissent entirely from this opinion. It appears to us that the differences are as strikingly marked between 'Lochrine' and 'Titus Andronicus' as between 'Titus Andronicus' and 'Othello.' Those productions were separated by at least twenty years. The youth might have produced Aaron; the perfect master of his art, Iago. There is the broad mark of originality in the characterization and language of 'Titus Andronicus.' The terrible passions which are there developed by the action find their vent in the appropriate language of passion, the bold and sometimes rude outpourings of nature. The characters of 'Lochrine' are moved to

passion, but first and last they speak out of books. In Shakspeare, high poetry is the most natural language of passion. It belongs to the state of excitement in which the character is placed; it harmonizes with the excited state of the reader or of the audience. But the whole imagery of 'Lochrine' is mythological. In a speech of twenty lines we have Rhadamanthus, Hercules, Eurydice, Erebus, Pluto, Mors, Tantalus, Pelops, Tithonus, Minos, Jupiter, Mars, and Tisiphone. The mythological pedantry is carried to such an extent, that the play, though unquestionably written in sober sadness, is a perfect travesty of this peculiarity of the early dramatists. Conventional as Greene and Marlowe are in their imagery, a single act of 'Lochrine' contains more of this tinsel than all their plays put together, prone as they are to this species of decoration. In the author of 'Lochrine' it becomes so entirely ridiculous, that this quality alone would decide us to say that Marlowe had nothing to do with it, or Greene either. It belongs, if not to a period scarcely removed from the rude art of the early stages, at least to a period when the principles of real dramatic poetry had not been generally received. It is essentially of the first transition state, in point of conception and execution.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DRAMATISTS OF SHAKSPERE'S FIRST PERIOD.

THE royal patent of 1574 authorized in the exercise of their art and faculty "James Burbadge, John Perkyn, John Lanham, William Johnson, and Robert Wilson," who are described as the servants of the Earl of Leicester. Although on the early stage the characters were frequently doubled, we can scarcely imagine that these five persons were of themselves sufficient to form a company of comedians. They had, no doubt, subordinate actors in their pay; they being the

proprietors or shareholders in the general adventure. Of these five original patentees, four remained as the "sharers in the Blackfriars Playhouse" in 1589, the name only of John Perkyn being absent from the subscribers to a certificate to the Privy Council, that the company acting at the Blackfriars "have never given cause of displeasure in that they have brought into their plays matters of state and religion." This certificate—which bears the date of November, 1589—

exhibits to us the list of the professional companions of Shakspeare in an early stage of his career, though certainly not in the very earliest. The certificate represents the persons subscribing it as "her Majesty's poor players," and sets forth that they are "all of them sharers in the Blackfriars Playhouse." Their names are presented in the following order:—

1. James Burbadge.
2. Richard Burbadge.
3. John Laneham.
4. Thomas Greene.
5. Robert Wilson.
6. John Taylor.
7. Anth. Wadeson.
8. Thomas Pope.
9. George Peele.
10. Augustine Phillipps.
11. Nicholas Towley.
12. William Shakespeare.
13. William Kempe.
14. William Johnson.
15. Baptiste Goodale.
16. Robert Armin.

In the 'Account of GEORGE PEELE and his Writings,' prefixed to Mr. Dyce's valuable edition of his works (1829), the editor says, "I think it very probable that Peele occasionally tried his histrionic talents, particularly at the commencement of his career, but that he was ever engaged as a regular actor I altogether disbelieve." But the publication, in 1835, by Mr. Collier, of the above certificate of the good conduct in 1589 of the Blackfriars company, which he discovered amongst the Bridgewater Papers, would appear to determine the question contrary to the belief of Mr. Dyce. Mr. Collier, in the tract in which he first published this important document*, says, with reference to the enumeration of Peele in the certificate, "George Peele was unquestionably the dramatic poet, who, I conjectured some years ago, was upon the stage early in life." The name of George Peele stands ninth on this list; that of William Shakespeare the twelfth. The name of William Kempe immediately follows that of Shakspeare. Kempe must have become of importance to the company

at least a year before the date of this certificate; for he was the successor of Tarleton in the most attractive line of characters, and Tarleton died in 1588. We hold that Shakspeare had won his position in this company at the age of twenty-five by his success as a dramatic writer; and we consider that in the same manner George Peele had preceded him, and had acquired rank and property amongst the shareholders, chiefly by the exercise of his talents as a dramatic poet.

There can be little doubt that upon the early stage, the occupations of actor and "maker of plays" for the most part went together. The dialogue was less regarded than the action. A plot was hastily got up, with rude shows and startling incidents. The characters were little discriminated; one actor took the tyrant line, and another the lover; and ready words were at hand for the one to rant with and the other to whine. The actors were not very solicitous about the words, and often discharged their mimic passions in extemporaneous eloquence. In a few years the necessity of pleasing more refined audiences changed the economy of the stage. Men of high talent sought the theatre as a ready mode of maintenance by their writings; but their connexion with the stage would naturally begin in acting rather than in authorship. The managers, themselves actors, would think, and perhaps rightly, that an actor would be the best judge of dramatic effect; and a Master of Arts, unless he were thoroughly conversant with the business of the stage, might better carry his taffeta phrases to the publishers of sonnets. The rewards of authorship through the medium of the press were in those days small indeed; and paltry as was the dramatist's fee, the players were far better paymasters than the stationers. To become a sharer in a theatrical speculation offered a reasonable chance of competence, if not of wealth. If a sharer existed who was "excellent" enough in "the quality" he professed to fill the stage creditably, and added to that quality "a facetious grace in writing," there is no doubt that with "uprightness of dealing" he would, in such a company as that of the Blackfriars, advance

* 'New Facts regarding the Life of Shakespeare.'

rapidly to distinction, and have the countenance and friendship of "divers of worship." Such was the character given to Shakspeare himself in 1592. One of the early puritanical attacks upon the stage has this coarse invective against players: "Are they not notoriously known to be those men in their life abroad, as they are on the stage, roysters, brawlers, ill-dealers, boasters, lovers, loiterers, ruffians? So that they are always exercised in playing their parts and practising wickedness; making that an art, to the end that they might the better gesture it in their parts?" By the side of this silly abuse may be placed the modest answer of Thomas Heywood, the most prolific of writers, himself an actor: "I also could wish that such as are condemned for their licentiousness might by a general consent be quite excluded our society; for, as we are men that stand in the broad eye of the world, so should our manners, gestures, and behaviours, savour of such government and modesty, to deserve the good thoughts and reports of all men, and to abide the sharpest censure even of those that are the greatest opposites to the quality. Many amongst us I know to be of substance, of government, of sober lives, and temperate carriages, housekeepers, and contributory to all duties enjoined them, equally with them that are ranked with the most bountiful; and if, amongst so many of sort, there be any few degenerate from the rest in that good demeanour which is both requisite and expected from their hands, let me entreat you not to censure hardly of all for the misdeeds of some, but rather to excuse us, as Ovid doth the generality of women:—

'Parcite paucarum diffundere crimen in omnes;
Spectetur meritis quæque puella suis.'*

Those of Peele's dramatic works which have come down to us afford evidence that he possessed great flexibility and rhetorical power, without much invention, with very little discrimination of character, and with that tendency to extravagance in the management of his incidents which exhibits small acquaintance with the higher principles of the dramatic art. He no doubt became a writer for the stage earlier than Shakspeare. He

* 'Apology for Actors.'

brought to the task a higher poetical feeling, and more scholarship, than had been previously employed in the rude dialogue which varied the primitive melodramatic exhibitions, which afforded a rare delight to audiences with whom the novel excitement of the entertainment compensated for many of its grossnesses and deficiencies. Thomas Nash, in his address 'To the Gentlemen Students of both Universities,' prefixed to Greene's 'Menaphon,' mentions Peele amongst the most celebrated poets of the day, "as the chief supporter of pleasance now living, the Atlas of poetry, and *primus verborum artifex*; whose first increase, the 'Arraignment of Paris,' might plead to your opinions his pregnant dexterity of wit, and manifold variety of invention, wherein (*me judice*) he goeth a step beyond all that write." 'The Arraignment of Paris,' which Nash describes as Peele's first increase, or first production, was performed before the Queen in 1584, by the children of her chapel. It is called in the title-page "a pastoral." It is not improbable that the favour with which this mythological story of the Judgment of Paris was received at the Court of Elizabeth might in some degree have given Peele his rank in the company of the Queen's players, who appear to have had some joint interest with the children of the chapel. The pastoral possesses little of the dramatic spirit; but we occasionally meet with passages of great descriptive elegance, rich in fancy, though somewhat overlaboured. The goddesses, however, talk with great freedom, we might say with a slight touch of mortal vulgarity. This would scarcely displease the courtly throng; but the approbation would be overpowering at the close, when Diana bestows the golden ball, and Venus, Pallas, and Juno cheerfully resign their pretensions in favour of the superior beauty, wisdom, and princely state, of the great Eliza. Such scenes were probably not for the multitude who thronged to the Blackfriars. Peele was the poet of the City as well as of the Court. He produced a Lord Mayor's Pageant in 1585, when Sir Wolstan Dixie was chief magistrate, in which London, Magnanimity, Loyalty, the Country, the Thames, the Sol-

dier, the Sailor, Science, and a quaternion of nymphs, gratulate the City in melodious verse. Another of his pageants before "Mr. William Web, Lord Mayor," in 1591, has come down to us. He was ready with his verses when Sir Henry Lee resigned the office of Queen's Champion in 1590; and upon the occasion also of an Installation at Windsor in 1593. When Elizabeth visited Theobalds in 1591, Peele produced the speeches with which the Queen was received, in the absence of Lord Burleigh, by members of his household, in the characters of a hermit, a gardener, and a mole-catcher. In all these productions we find the facility which distinguished his dramatic writings, but nothing of that real power which was to breathe a new life into the entertainments for the people. The early play of 'Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes' is considered by Mr. Dyce to be the production of Peele. It is a most tedious drama, in the old twelve-syllable rhyming verse, in which the principle of alliteration is carried into the most ludicrous absurdity, and the pathos is scarcely more moving than the woes of Pyramus and Thisby in A 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' One example of a lady in distress may suffice:—

"The sword of this my loving knight, behold, I
here do take,
Of this my woeful corpse, alas, a final end to
make!
Yet, ere I strike that deadly stroke that shall
my life deprave,
Ye, Muses, aid me to the gods for mercy first
to crave!"

In a few years, perhaps by the aid of better examples, Peele worked himself out of many of the absurdities of the early stage; but he had not strength wholly to cast them off. We shall notice his historical play of 'Edward I.' in the examination of the theory that he was the author of the three Parts of Henry VI. in their original state; and it is scarcely necessary for us here to enter more minutely into the question of his dramatic ability. It is pretty manifest that a new race of writers, with Shakspeare at their head, was rising up to push Peele from the position which he held in the Blackfriars com-

pany in 1589. He is one of the three to whom Robert Greene in 1592 addressed his dying warning. Peele was, according to the repentant profligate, driven, like himself, to extreme shifts. He was in danger, like Greene, of being forsaken by the puppets "that speak from our mouths." The reason that the players are not to be trusted is because their place is supplied by another: "Yes, trust them not; for there is an upstart crow beautified with our feathers, that, with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you; and, being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country."

ROBERT GREENE has been described by his friend Henry Chettle as a "man of indifferent years, of face amiable, of body well-proportioned, his attire after the habit of a scholar-like gentleman, only his hair somewhat long." Greene took his degree of Bachelor of Arts at Cambridge in 1578, and his Master's degree in 1583. The "somewhat long hair" is scarcely incompatible with the "attire after the habit of a scholar." Chettle's description of the outward appearance of the man would scarcely lead us to imagine, what he has himself told us, that "his company were lightly the lewdest persons in the land." In one of his posthumous tracts, 'The Repentance of Robert Greene,' which Mr. Dyce, the editor of his works, holds to be genuine, he says, "I left the University and away to London, where (after I had continued some short time, and driven myself out of credit with sundry of my friends) I became an author of plays, and a penner of love pamphlets, so that I soon grew famous in that quality, that who for that trade grown so ordinary about London as Robin Greene? Young yet in years, though old in wickedness, I began to resolve that there was nothing bad that was profitable: whereupon I grew so rooted in all mischief, that I had as great a delight in wickedness as sundry hath in godliness; and as much felicity I took in villainy as others had in honesty." The whole story of Greene's life renders it too probable that Gabriel Harvey's spiteful caricature of him had much of that real re-

semblance which renders a caricature most effective: "I was altogether unacquainted with the man, and never once saluted him by name: but who in London hath not heard of his dissolute and licentious living; his fond disguising of a Master of Art with ruffianly hair, unseemly apparel, and more unseemly company; his vainglorious and Thrasonical braving; his fripperly extemporizing and Tarletonizing; his apish counterfeiting of every ridiculous and absurd toy; his fine cozening of jugglers, and finer juggling with cozeners; his villainous cogging and foisting; his monstrous swearing and horrible forswearing; his impious profaning of sacred texts; his other scandalous and blasphemous raving; his riotous and outrageous surfeiting; his continual shifting of lodgings; his plausible mustering and banqueting of roysterly acquaintance at his first coming; his beggarly departing in every hostess's debt; his infamous resorting to the Bankside, Shoreditch, Southwark, and other filthy haunts; his obscure lurking in basest corners; his pawning of his sword, cloak, and what not, when money came short; his impudent pamphleting, fantastical interluding, and desperate libelling, when other cozening shifts failed?"* This is the bitterness of revenge, not softened even by the penalty which the wretched man had paid for his offence, dying prematurely in misery and solitariness, and writing from his lodging at a poor shoemaker's these last touching lines to the wife whom he had abandoned: "Doll, I charge thee by the love of our youth, and by my soul's rest, that thou wilt see this man paid: for if he and his wife had not succoured me, I had died in the streets." As a writer he was one amongst the most popular of his day. His little romances of some fifty pages each were the delight of readers for amusement, for half a century. They were the companions of the courtly and the humble,—eagerly perused by the scholar of the University and the apprentice of the City. They reached the extreme range of popularity. In Anthony Wood's time they were "mostly sold on ballad-monger's stalls;" and Sir Thomas Overbury describes his Chambermaid

as reading "Greene's works over and over." Some of these tales are full of genius, ill-regulated no doubt, but so pregnant with invention, that Shakspeare in the height of his fame did not disdain to avail himself of the stories of his early contemporary. The dramatic works of Greene were probably much more numerous than the few which have come down to us; and the personal character of the man is not unaptly represented in these productions. They exhibit great pomp and force of language; passages which degenerate into pure bombast from their ambitious attempts to display the power of words; slight discrimination of character; incoherence of incident; and an entire absence of that judgment which results in harmony and proportion. His extravagant pomp of language was the characteristic of all the writers of the early stage except Shakspeare; and equally so were those attempts to be humorous which sank into the lowest buffoonery. In the lyrical pieces which are scattered up and down Greene's novels, there is occasionally a quiet beauty which exhibits the real depths of the man's genius. Amidst all his imperfections of character, that genius is fully acknowledged by the best of his contemporaries.

THOMAS LODGE was Greene's senior in age, and greatly his superior in conduct. He had been a graduate of Oxford; next a player, though probably for a short time; was a member of Lincoln's Inn; and, finally, a successful physician of the name of Thomas Lodge is held to be identical with Lodge the poet. He was the author of a tragedy, 'The Wounds of Civil War: lively set forth in the true Tragedies of Marius and Sylla.' He had become a writer for the stage before the real power of dramatic blank verse had been adequately conceived. His lines possess not the slightest approach to flexibility; they invariably consist of ten syllables, with a pause at the end of every line—"each alley like its brother;" the occasional use of the triplet is the only variety. Lodge's tragedy has the appearance of a most correct and laboured performance; and the result is that of insufferable tediousness. In conjunction with Greene he wrote 'A Looking Glass for

* 'Four Letters, &c., 1592.'

London,' one of the most extraordinary productions of that period of the stage, the character of which is evidently derived not from any desire of the writers to accommodate themselves to the taste of an unrefined audience, but from an utter deficiency of that common sense which could alone recommend their learning and their satire to the popular apprehension. For pedantry and absurdity 'The Looking Glass for London' is unsurpassed. Lodge, as well as Greene, was a writer of little romances; and here he does not disdain the powers of nature and simplicity. The early writers for the stage, indeed, seem one and all to have considered that the language of the drama was conventional; that the expressions of real passion ought never there to find a place; that grief should discharge itself in long soliloquies, and anger explode in orations set forth upon the most approved forms of logic and rhetoric. There is some of this certainly in the prose romances of Greene and Lodge. Lovers make very long protestations, which are far more calculated to display their learning than their affection. This is the sin of most pastorals. But nature sometimes prevails, and we meet with a touching simplicity, which is the best evidence of real power. Lodge, as well as Greene, gave a fable to Shakspeare.

Another of the chosen companions of Robert Greene was THOMAS NASH, who in his "beardless years" had thrown himself upon the town, having forfeited the honours which his talents would have commanded in the due course of his University studies. In an age before that of newspapers and reviews, this young man was a pamphleteering critic; and very sharp, and to a great extent very just, is his criticism. The drama, even at this early period, is the bow of Apollo for all ambitious poets. It is Nash who, in the days of Locrine, and Tamburlaine, and perhaps Andronicus, is the first to laugh at "the servile imitation of vainglorious tragedians, who contend not so seriously to excel in action, as to embowel the clouds in a speech of comparison; thinking themselves more than initiated in poets' immortality if they but once get Boreas by the beard, and

the heavenly Bull by the dewlap."* It is he who despises the "idiot art-masters that intrude themselves to our ears as the alchemists of eloquence, who, mounted on the stage of arrogance, think to outbrave better pens with the swelling bombast of bragging blank verse."† In a year or two Nash was the foremost of controversialists. There are few things in our language written in a bitterer spirit than his pamphlets in the "Marpelate" controversy, and his letters to Gabriel Harvey. Greene, as it appears to us, upon his deathbed warned Nash of the danger of his course: "With thee [Marlowe] I join young Juvenal, that biting satirist, that lastly with me together writ a comedy. Sweet boy, might I advise thee, be advised, and get not many enemies by bitter words: inveigh against vain men, for thou canst do it, no man better, no man so well: thou hast a liberty to reprove all, and name none: for one being spoken to, all are offended; none being blamed, no man is injured. Stop shallow water still running, it will rage; tread on a worm, and it will turn: then blame not scholars who are vexed with sharp and bitter lines, if they reprove thy too much liberty of reproof." It is usual to state that Thomas Lodge is the person thus addressed. So say Malone and Mr. Dyce. The expression, "that lastly with me together writ a comedy," is supposed to point to the union of Greene and Lodge in the composition of 'The Looking-Glass for London.' But it is much easier to believe that Greene and Nash wrote a comedy which is unknown to us, than that Greene should address Lodge, some years his elder, as "young Juvenal," and "sweet boy." Neither have we any evidence that Lodge was a "biting satirist," and used "bitter words" and personalities never to be forgiven. We hold that the warning was meant for Nash. It was given in vain; for he spent his high talents in calling others rogue and fool, and having the words returned upon him with interest; bespattering, and bespattered.

That impatient spirit, with the flashing eye and the lofty brow, is CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE. It is he who addressed his first audience in

* Epistle prefixed to Greene's 'Menaphon.'

† Ibid.

words which told them that one of high pretensions was come to rescue the stage from the dominion of feebleness and buffoonery:—

“From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,
As such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine,
Threat'ning the world with high astounding terms.”*

His daring was successful. It is he who is accounted the “famous gracer of tragedians.”† It is he who has “gorgeously invested with rare ornaments and splendid habiliments the English tongue.”‡ It is he who, after his tragical end, was held

“Fit to write passions for the souls below.”§

It is he of the “mighty line.”|| The name of Tamburlaine was applied to Marlowe himself by his contemporaries. It is easy to imagine that he might be such a man as he has delighted to describe in his Scythian Shepherd:—

“Of stature tall, and straightly fashioned,
Like his desire lift upward and divine;
So large of limbs, his joints so strongly knit,
Such breadth of shoulders as might mainly bear
Old Atlas' burthen.
Pale of complexion, wrought in him with passion,
Thirsting with sovereignty and love of arms.
His lofty brows in folds do figure death,
And in their smoothness amity and life;
About them hangs a knot of amber hair,
Wrapped in curls, as fierce Achilles' was,
On which the breath of heaven delights to play,
Making it dance with wanton majesty.
His arms and fingers, long and snowy-white,
Betokening valour and excess of strength.”¶

The essential character of his mind was that of a lofty extravagance, shaping itself into words that may be likened to the trumpet in music, and the scarlet in painting—per-

petual trumpet, perpetual scarlet. One of the courtiers of Tamburlaine says,—

“You see, my lord, what working words he hath.”

Hear a few of these “working words:”—

“The god of war resigns his room to me,
Meaning to make me general of the world:
Jove, viewing me in arms, looks pale and wan,
Fearing my power should pull him from his throne.

Where'er I come the fatal sisters sweat,
And grisly death, by running to and fro,
To do their ceaseless homage to my sword;
And here, in Afric, where it seldom rains,
Since I arriv'd with my triumphant host,
Have swelling clouds, drawn from wide-gasp-
ing wounds,

Been oft resolv'd in bloody, purple showers,
A meteor that might terrify the earth,
And make it quake at every drop it drinks.”**

Through five thousand lines have we the same pompous monotony, the same splendid exaggeration, the same want of truthful simplicity. But the man was in earnest. His poetical power had nothing in it of affectation and pretence. There is one speech of Tamburlaine which unveils the inmost mind of Tamburlaine's author. It is by far the highest passage in the play, revealing to us something nobler than the verses which “jet on the stage in tragical buskins, every word filling the mouth like the faburden of Bow-Bell.”—

“Nature that form'd us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds;
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world,
And measure every wandering planet's course,
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Will us to wear ourselves, and never rest,
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all.”††

The “ripest fruit of all,” with Tamburlaine, was an “earthly crown;” but with Marlowe, there can be little doubt, the “climbing after knowledge infinite” was to be rewarded with wisdom, and peace, the fruit of wisdom. But he sought for the “fruit” in dark and for-

* Prologue to ‘Tamburlaine the Great.’ † Greene.

‡ Meres.

§ Peele.

|| Jonson.

¶ ‘Tamburlaine,’ Part I., Act II.

** ‘Tamburlaine,’ Part I., Act V. †† Ibid. Part I., Act II.

bidden paths. He plunged into the haunts of wild and profligate men, lighting up their murky caves with his poetical torch, and gaining nothing from them but the renewed power of scorning the unspiritual things of our being, without the resolution to seek for wisdom in the daylight track which every man may tread. If his life had not been fatally cut short, the fiery spirit might have learnt the value of meekness, and the daring sceptic have cast away the bitter "fruit" of half-knowledge. He did not long survive the fearful exhortation of his dying companion, the unhappy Greene:—"Wonder not, thou famous gracer of tragedians, that Greene, who hath said with thee, like the fool in his heart, there is no God, should now give glory unto His greatness: for penetrating is His power, His hand lies heavy upon me, He hath spoken unto me with a voice of thunder, and I have felt He is a God that can punish enemies. Why should thy excellent wit, His gift, be so blinded that thou shouldst give no glory to the giver?" Marlowe resented the accusation which Greene's words conveyed. We may hope that he did more; that he felt, to use other words of the same memorable exhortation, that the "liberty" which he sought was an "infernal bondage."

"Eloquent and witty JOHN LYLY"* was called, by a bookseller who collected his plays some forty years or more after their appearance, "the only rare poet of that time, the witty, comical, facetiously quick, and unparalleled John Lyly, Master of Arts." Such is the puff-direct of a title-page of 1632. The title-pages and the puffs have parted company in our day, to carry on their partnership in separate fields, and sometimes looking loftily on each other, as if they were not twin-brothers. He it was that took hold of the somewhat battered and clipped but sterling coin of our old language, and, minting it afresh, with a very sufficient quantity of alloy, produced a sparkling currency, the very counters of court compliment. It was truly said, and it was meant for praise, that he "hath stepped one step further than any either before or since he first began the witty discourse of his 'Euphues.'"[†] According

* Meres. † Webbe's 'Discourse of English Poetry,' 1586.

to Nash, "he is but a little fellow, but he hath one of the best wits in England."[‡] The little man knew

"What hell it is in suing long to bide."

He had been a dreary time waiting and petitioning for the place of Master of the Revels. In his own peculiar phraseology he tells the Queen, in one of his petitions,— "For these ten years I have attended with an unwearied patience, and now I know not what crab took me for an oyster, that in the midst of your sunshine, of your most gracious aspect, hath thrust a stone between the shells to rate me alive that only live on dead hopes."§ Drayton described him truly, at a later period, when poetry had asserted her proper rights, as

"Talking of stones, stars, plants, of fishes, flies,
Playing with words, and idle similies."

Lyly was undoubtedly the predecessor of Shakspeare. His 'Alexander and Campaspe,' acted not only at Court but at the Blackfriars, was printed as early as 1584. It is not easy to understand how a popular audience could ever have sat it out; but the incomprehensible and the excellent are sometimes confounded. What should we think of a prologue, addressed to a gaping pit, and hushing the cracking of nuts into silence, which commences thus?—"They that fear the stinging of wasps make fans of peacocks' tails, whose spots are like eyes: and Lepidus, which could not sleep for the chattering of birds, set up a beast whose head was like a dragon: and we, which stand in awe of report, are compelled to set before our owl Pallas's shield, thinking by her virtue to cover the other's deformity." Shakspeare was a naturalist, and a true one; but Lyly was the more inventive, for he made his own natural history. The epilogue to the same play informs the confiding audience that "Where the rainbow toucheth the tree no caterpillars will hang on the leaves; where the glow-worm creepeth in the night no adder will go in the day." 'Alexander and Campaspe' is in prose. The action is little,

‡ 'Apology of Pierce Pennilesse.'

§ Petition to the Queen in the Harleian MSS.: Dodsley's Old Plays, 1825, vol. ii.

the talk is everything. Hephæstion exhorts Alexander against the danger of love, in a speech that with very slight elaboration would be long enough for a sermon. Apelles soliloquizes upon his own love for Campaspe in a style so insufferably tedious, that we could wish to thrust the picture that he sighs over down his rhetorical throat (even as Pistol was made to swallow the leek), if he did not close his oration with one of the prettiest songs of our old poetry:—

“Cupid and my Campaspe play’d
At cards for kisses, Cupid paid;
He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows,
His mother’s doves and team of sparrows;
Loses them, too; then down he throws
The coral of his lip, the rose
Growing on ’s cheek (but none knows how),
With these the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple of his chin;
All these did my Campaspe win.
At last he set her both his eyes,
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
O Love! has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas! become of me?”

The dramatic system of Lyly is a thing unique in its kind. He never attempts to deal with realities. He revels in pastoral and mythological subjects. He makes his gods and goddesses, his nymphs and shepherds, all speak a language which common mortals would disdain to use. In prose or in verse, they are all the cleverest of the clever. They are, one and all, passionless beings, with no voice but that of their showman. But it is easy to see how a man of considerable talent would hold such things to be the proper refinements to banish for ever the vulgarities of the old comedy. He had not the genius to discover that the highest drama was essentially for the people; and that its foundations must rest upon the elemental properties of mankind, whether to produce tears or laughter that should command a lasting and universal sympathy. Lyly came too early, or too late, to gather any enduring fame; and he lived to see a new race of writers, and one towering above the rest, who cleared the stage of his tinselled puppets, and filled the scene with noble copies of humanity. His fate was a

hard one. Without the vices of men of higher talent, he had to endure poverty and disappointment, doomed to spin his “pithy sentences and gallant tropes” for a thankless Court and a neglectful multitude; and, with a tearful merriment, writing to his Queen, “In all humility I intreat that I may dedicate to your Sacred Majesty Lyly de Tristibus, wherein shall be seen patience, labours, and misfortunes.”

THOMAS KYD was the author of ‘Jeronimo,’ which men long held as the only best and judiciously penned play in Europe.* Wherever performed originally, the principal character was adapted to an actor of very small stature. It is not impossible that a precocious boy, one of the children of Paul’s, might have filled the character. Jeronimo the Spanish marshal, and Balthazar the Prince of Portugal, thus exchange compliments:—

“*Balthazar.* Thou inch of Spain,
Thou man, from thy hose downward scarce so much,
Thou very little longer than thy beard,
Speak not such big words; they’ll throw thee down,
Little Jeronimo: words greater than thyself!
It must be.

Jeronimo. And thou, long thing of Portugal, why not?
Thou that art full as tall
As an English gallows, upper beam and all,
Devourer of apparel, thou huge swallower,
My hose will scarce make thee a standing collar:
What! have I almost quited you?”

There can be no doubt that ‘Jeronimo,’ whatever remodelling it may have received, belongs essentially to the early stage. There is killing beyond all reasonable measure. Lorenzo kills Pedro, and Alexandro kills Rogero: Andrea is also killed, but he does not so readily quit the scene. After a decent interval, occupied by talk and fighting, the man comes again in the shape of his own ghost, according to the following stage-direction:—“Enter two, dragging of ensigns; then the funeral of Andrea: next

* Jonson’s Induction to ‘Cynthia’s Revels.’

Horatio and Lorenzo leading Prince Balthazar captive : then the Lord General, with others, mourning : a great cry within, Charon, a boat, a boat : then enter Charon and the Ghost of Andrea." Charon, Revenge, and the Ghost have a little pleasant dialogue ; and the Ghost then vanishes with the following triumphant words :—

"I am a happy ghost ;

Revenge, my passage now cannot be cross'd :

Come, Charon ; come, hell's sculler, waft me
o'er

Your sable streams which look like molten pitch ;

My funeral rites are made, my hearse hungry rich."

HENRY CHETTLE, a friend of Greene, but who seems to have been a man of higher morals, if of inferior genius ; and ANTHONY MUNDAY, who was called by Meres "the best plotter" (by which he probably means a manufacturer of dumb shows), are the only remaining dramatists, whose names have escaped oblivion, that can be called contemporaries of Shakspeare in his early days at the Blackfriars.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE CHRONOLOGY OF SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS.

THE order in which the thirty-six plays contained in the folio of 1623 are presented to the reader is contained in the following list, which forms a leaf of that edition :—

"A CATALOGUE OF THE SEVERAL COMEDIES, HISTORIES, AND TRAGEDIES CONTAINED IN THIS VOLUME.

Comedies.

The Tempest.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

The Merry Wives of Windsor.

Measure for Measure.

The Comedy of Errors.

Much Ado about Nothing.

Love's Labour's Lost.

Midsummer Night's Dream.

The Merchant of Venice.

As You Like It.

The Taming of the Shrew.

All's Well that Ends Well.

Twelfth Night, or What You Will.

The Winter's Tale.

Histories.

The Life and Death of King John.

The Life and Death of King Richard II.

The First Part of King Henry IV.

The Second Part of King Henry IV.

The Life of King Henry V.

The First Part of King Henry VI.

The Second Part of King Henry VI.

The Third Part of King Henry VI.

The Life and Death of Richard III.

The Life of King Henry VIII.

Tragedies.

Troilus and Cressida.

The Tragedy of Coriolanus.

Titus Andronicus.

Romeo and Juliet.

Timon of Athens.

The Life and Death of Julius Cæsar.

The Tragedy of Macbeth.

The Tragedy of Hamlet.

King Lear.

Othello, the Moor of Venice.

Antony and Cleopatra.

Cymbeline, King of Britain."

The general division here given of the plays into three classes is manifestly a discriminating and a just one. The editors were thoroughly cognizant of the distinction which Shakspeare drew between his Histories and Tragedies, as works of art. Subsequent editors have not so accurately seen this distinction ; for they have inserted 'Macbeth' immediately after the Comedies, and preceding 'King John,' as if it were a History, taking its place in the chronological order of events. It will be observed, also, that the original editors had a just regard to the order of events in their arrangement of the Histories, properly so called. But the order of succession in the Comedies and Tragedies must be considered an arbitrary one. Subsequent editors have introduced an order still more arbitrary ; and to Malone belongs

the credit of having endeavoured to place the Comedies and Tragedies in the order in which he supposed them to have been written. This arrangement took place in his posthumous edition; but, his preliminary notices to each play consisting of the various opinions of the commentators generally, the advantage of considering each with reference to the supposed epoch of its production was very imperfectly attained in that edition. We therefore resolved, previous to the commencement of our 'Pictorial Edition,' to establish in our own minds certain principles, which should become to us a general guide as to the order in which we should publish the Comedies and Tragedies; still, however, keeping the classes separate, and not mixing them, according to their supposed dates, as Malone had done. But we did not pretend, nor even desire, to establish an exact date for the original production of each play. We attempted only to obtain a general notion of the date of their production in several groups. There would, of course, occur, with reference to each play, some detailed investigation, which would exhibit facts having a tendency to approximate that play to a particular year; but we knew, and we have subsequently shown, that, with very few exceptions indeed, the confident chronological orders of Malone, and Chalmers, and Drake, have been little more than guesses, sometimes ingenious and plausible, but oftener unsatisfactory and almost childish. But it appeared to us that there were certain broad principles to be kept in view, which would offer no inconsiderable assistance in forming a just estimate of the growth of the poet's powers, and of his peculiarities of thought and style at different periods of his life. It is obvious that, upon some such estimate as this, however imperfect, much that is most valuable in any critical analysis of his works, and especially in any comparison with the works of his contemporaries, must in a large degree depend. The general views which we have taken differ considerably from those of our predecessors; and they do so, for the most part, because we have more facts to guide us,—and especially the one fact that he was

established in London, as a shareholder in the leading company of players, as early as the year 1589. We begin, therefore, by assuming that he was a writer for the stage five years at least before the period usually assigned for the commencement of his career as a dramatic poet. It may be convenient here briefly to recapitulate the reasons for this opinion, which we shall have to enforce in many subsequent passages of these "studies."

We shall first present an Abstract of Malone's last Chronological Order, as a case upon which to ground our argument.

	Poet's Age.
1. First Part of King Henry VI. 1589	25
2. Second Part of King Henry VI. 1591	27
3. Third Part of King Henry VI. 1591	
4. Two Gentlemen of Verona 1591	
5. Comedy of Errors 1592	28
6. King Richard II. 1593	29
7. King Richard III. 1593	
8. Love's Labour's Lost 1594	30
9. Merchant of Venice 1594	
10. Midsummer Night's Dream 1594	32
11. Taming of the Shrew 1596	
12. Romeo and Juliet 1596	
13. King John 1596	33
14. First Part of King Henry IV. 1597	
15. Second Part of King Henry IV. 1599	35
16. As you Like It 1599	
17. King Henry V. 1599	36
18. Much Ado about Nothing 1600	
19. Hamlet 1600	37
20. Merry Wives of Windsor 1601	38
21. Troilus and Cressida 1602	39
22. Measure for Measure 1603	
23. Henry VIII. 1603	40
24. Othello 1604	
25. Lear 1605	41
26. All's Well that Ends Well 1606	42
27. Macbeth 1606	
28. Julius Cæsar 1607	43
29. Twelfth Night 1607	
30. Antony and Cleopatra 1608	44
31. Cymbeline 1609	45
32. Coriolanus 1610	46
33. Timon of Athens 1610	
34. Winter's Tale 1611	47
35. Tempest 1611	
36. Pericles }	Omitted as
37. Titus Andronicus }	doubtful.

In 1598 Francis Meres published his '*Palladis Tamia*, Wit's Treasury,' which contains the most important notice of Shakspeare of any contemporary writer:—"As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare, among the English, is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage: for comedy, witness his '*Gentlemen of Verona*,' his '*Errors*,' his '*Love's Labour's Lost*,' his '*Love Labours Won*,' his '*Mid-summer's Night Dream*,' and his '*Merchant of Venice*;' for tragedy, his '*Richard II.*,' '*Richard III.*,' '*Henry IV.*,' '*King John*,' '*Titus Andronicus*,' and his '*Romeo and Juliet*.' "

This notice fixes the date of thirteen plays, as having been produced up to 1598. But this list can scarcely be supposed to be a complete one. The expression which Meres uses, "for comedy *witness*," implies that he selects particular examples of excellence. We know that the three parts of '*Henry VI.*' existed before 1598: we believe that '*The Taming of the Shrew*' was amongst the early plays; and that the original sketch of '*Hamlet*' had been produced at the very outset of Shakspeare's dramatic career. '*All's Well that Ends Well*,' we believe, also, to have been an early play, known to Meres as '*Love's Labour's Won*.' But carry the list of Meres forward two years, and we have to add '*Much Ado about Nothing*' and '*Henry V.*' which were then *printed*. The account, therefore, stands thus in 1600:—

Plays mentioned by Meres, considering	
Henry IV. as Two Parts	13
Henry VI., Three Parts	3
Taming of the Shrew }	2
Hamlet (sketch) }	
Much Ado about Nothing }	2
Henry V. }	
—	
20	

We have now seventeen plays, including '*Pericles*,' left for the seventeenth century; but some of these have established their claim to an earlier date than has been usually assigned to them. '*Twelfth Night*' and '*Othello*' were performed in 1602. Under the usual chronological order we are compelled, according to the analysis which we

have just given, to crowd twenty plays into ten years. But, putting aside '*Titus Andronicus*,' Meres gives us a list of twelve original plays existing when his book was printed in 1598—twelve plays which we would not exchange for all the contemporary dramatic literature produced in the years between 1593 and 1598. In support of these assertions, and these computations, not the slightest direct evidence has ever been offered. The indirect evidence constantly alleged against Shakspeare being a writer before he was twenty-seven years old is that he had obtained no reputation, and is not even mentioned by any contemporary, previously to the satirical notice of him in the last production of Robert Greene, who died in September, 1592, in which he is called "the only Shake-scene in the country." The very terms used by Greene would imply that the successful author of whom he was envious had acquired a reputation. But this is not the usual construction put on the words. The silence of other writers with regard to Shakspeare is minutely set forth by Malone; and his opinions, as it appears to us, have been much too implicitly received—sometimes indolently—sometimes for the support of a theory that would recognise Shakspeare as a mere actor, or, at most, as the repairer of other men's works—whilst the original genius of Marlowe, and half a dozen inferior writers, was in full activity around him. The omission of all notice of Shakspeare by Webbe, Puttenham, Harrington, Sidney, are brought forward by Malone as unquestionable proofs that our poet had not written before 1591 or 1592. He says that in Webbe's '*Discourse of English Poetry*,' published in 1586, we meet with the names of the most celebrated poets of that time, particularly those of the dramatic writers Whetstone and Munday; but that we find no trace of Shakspeare or of his works. But Malone does not tell us that Webbe makes a general apology for his omissions, saying, "Neither is my abiding in such place where I can with facility get knowledge of their works." "Three years afterwards," continues Malone, "Puttenham printed his '*Art of English Poesy*;' and in that work also we look in vain for the name

of Shakspeare." The book speaks of the one-and-thirty years' space of Elizabeth's reign, and thus puts the date of the writing a year earlier than the printing. But we here look in vain for some other illustrious names besides that of Shakspeare. Malone has not told us that the *name* of Edmund Spenser is not found in Puttenham; nor, what is still more uncandid, that not one of Shakspeare's early dramatic contemporaries is mentioned—neither Marlowe, nor Greene, nor Peele, nor Kyd, nor Lyly. The author evidently derives his knowledge of "poets and poesy" from a much earlier period than that in which he publishes. He does not mention Spenser by *name*, but he does "that other gentleman who wrote the late 'Shepherd's Calendar.'" The 'Shepherd's Calendar' of Spenser was published in the year 1579. Malone goes on to argue that the omission of Shakspeare's name, or any notice of his works, in Sir John Harrington's 'Apology of Poetry,' printed in 1591, in which "he takes occasion to speak of the theatre, and mentions some of the celebrated dramas of that time," is a proof that none of Shakspeare's dramatic compositions had then appeared. The "celebrated dramas" which Harrington mentions are Latin plays, and an old London comedy called 'Play of the Cards.' Does he mention 'Tamburlaine,' or 'Faustus,' or 'The Massacre of Paris,' or 'The Jew of Malta?' As he does not, it may be assumed with equal justice that none of Marlowe's compositions had appeared in 1591; and yet we know that he died in 1593. So of Lyly's 'Galathea,' 'Alexander and Campaspe,' 'Endymion,' &c. So of Greene's 'Orlando Furioso,' 'Friar Bacon,' 'James IV.' So of the 'Jeronimo' of Kyd. The truth is, that Harrington in his notice of celebrated dramas was even more antiquated than Puttenham; and his evidence, therefore, in this matter is utterly worthless. But Malone has given his crowning proof that Shakspeare had not written before 1591, in the following words:—"Sir Philip Sidney, in his 'Defence of Poesie,' speaks at some length of the low state of dramatic literature at the time he composed this treatise, but has not the slightest allusion to Shakspeare, whose plays,

had they then appeared, would doubtless have rescued the English stage from the contempt which is thrown upon it by the accomplished writer, and to which it was justly exposed by the wretched compositions of those who preceded our poet. 'The Defence of Poesie' was not published till 1595, but must have been written some years before." There is one slight objection to this argument: Sir Philip Sidney was killed at the battle of Zutphen, in the year 1586; and it is tolerably well ascertained that 'The Defence of Poesie' was written in the year 1581.

If the indirect evidence that Shakspeare had not acquired any reputation in 1591 thus breaks down, we may venture to inquire whether the same authority has not been equally unsuccessful in rejecting the belief, which was implicitly adopted by Dryden and Rowe, that the reputation of Shakspeare as a comic poet was distinctly recognised by Spenser in his 'Thalia,' in 1591*.

What, then, is the theory which we build upon the various circumstances we have brought together, and which we oppose to the prevailing theory in England as to the dates of Shakspeare's works? We ask that the author of *twenty plays*, existing in 1600, which completely changed the face of the dramatic literature of England, should be supposed to have begun to write a little earlier than the age of twenty-seven; that we should assign some few of those plays to a period antecedent to 1590. We have reason to believe that, up to the close of the sixteenth century, Shakspeare was busied as an actor as well as an author. It is something too much to expect, then, even from the fertility of his genius, occupied as he was, that he should have produced twenty plays in nine years; and it is still more unreasonable to believe that the consciousness of power which he must have possessed should not have prompted him to enter the lists with other dramatists (whose highest productions may, without exaggeration, be stated as every way inferior to his lowest),

* This poem of 'Thalia' is noticed in 'The Life and Writings of Shakspeare,' in Knight's 'Cabinet' and One Volume editions of Shakspeare.

until he had gone through a probation of six or seven years' acquaintance with the stage as an humble actor. We cannot reconcile it to probability that he who ceased to be an actor when he was forty should have been contented to have been only an actor till he was twenty-seven. We cling to the belief that Shakspeare, by commencing his career as a dramatic writer some four or five years earlier than is generally maintained, may claim, in common with his less illustrious early contemporaries, the praise of being one of the great founders of our dramatic literature, instead of being the mere follower and improver of Marlowe, and Greene, and Peele, and Kyd.

Our belief, then, as to the periods of the original production of Shakspeare's Plays, shapes itself into something like the following arrangement :—

FIRST PERIOD, 1585 to 1593. From his 21st year to his 29th.

Titus Andronicus.
Hamlet. The first sketch.
Henry VI. Three Parts.
Two Gentlemen of Verona.
Comedy of Errors.
Love's Labour's Lost.
All's Well that Ends Well (perhaps imperfect).
Taming of the Shrew (the same).

SECOND PERIOD, 1594 to 1600. From his 30th year to his 36th.

Richard III.
Richard II.
Henry IV. Two Parts.
Henry V.
King John.
A Midsummer Night's Dream.
Romeo and Juliet.
Merchant of Venice.
Much Ado about Nothing.
Merry Wives of Windsor.

THIRD PERIOD, 1601 to 1607. From his 37th year to his 43rd.

As You Like It.
Twelfth Night.
Measure for Measure.
Hamlet (complete).
Othello.
Lear.

Macbeth.

Timon of Athens (probably revision of an earlier play).

FOURTH PERIOD, 1608 to 1616. From his 44th year to his death.

Cymbeline (probably revision of an earlier play).

A Winter's Tale.

Pericles (probably revision of an earlier play).

The Tempest.

Troilus and Cressida.

Henry VIII.

Coriolanus.

Julius Cæsar.

Antony and Cleopatra.

There is another view in which the chronological order of Shakspeare's plays may be regarded: and we think that it presents a key to the workings of his genius, in connexion with that desire which men of the highest genius only entertain, when a constant succession of new productions is demanded of them by the popular appetite—namely, to generalize their works by certain principles of art, producing *novel* combinations; which principles impart to groups of them belonging to the same period a corresponding identity. In Shakspeare this is to be regarded more especially with reference to the nature of the dramatic action. We put down these groups, rather as materials for thought in the reader, than as a decided expression of our own conviction; because all such circumstances and relations must be modified by other facts of which we have an incomplete knowledge.

THE TRAGEDY OF HORRORS.

Titus Andronicus	} Earliest period;—1585 to 1588.
Hamlet. First sketch	
Romeo and Juliet. First sketch*	

ENGLISH HISTORY.

Of a Tragic Cast.

Henry VI. Three Parts	} Second early period;—1589 to 1593.
Richard III.	
Richard II.	

* Our reasons for considering the first 'Hamlet' and 'Romeo and Juliet' to belong to this class are given in the next chapter, on 'Titus Andronicus.'

Of Mixed Tragedy and Comedy.

King John	} 1596 to 1599; — middle period.
Henry IV. Two Parts	
Henry V.	

COMEDY.

Two Gentlemen of Verona	} Second early period; — 1589 to 1593.
Comedy of Errors	
Love's Labour's Lost	
All's Well that Ends Well	
Taming of the Shrew	
Midsummer Night's Dream	} 1594 to 1599; middle pe- riod.
Merchant of Venice	
Much Ado about Nothing	
Merry Wives of Windsor	
Twelfth Night	
Romeo and Juliet (complete)	

THE TRAGEDY OF PASSION AND CHARACTER.

Hamlet (complete)	} First matured period; — 1600 to 1608.
Othello	
Lear	
Macbeth	

THE POETICAL LEGENDARY TALE, OR ROMANTIC
DRAMA.

As You Like It	} First matured period; — 1600 to 1608.
Cymbeline	
Winter's Tale	
Tempest	
Pericles	

TRAGI-COMEDY.

Measure for Measure	} Second ma- tured period; — 1609 to 1615.
Troilus and Cressida	
Timon of Athens	

ROMAN PLAYS.

Coriolanus	} Second ma- tured period; — 1609 to 1615.
Julius Cæsar	
Antony and Cleopatra	
Henry VIII.	

We subjoin a Chronological Table of Shakspeare's Plays, which we have constructed with some care, showing the *positive* facts which determine dates *previous* to which they were produced.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF SHAKSPERE'S PLAYS.

Henry VI., Part I.	. Alluded to by Nashe in 'Pierce Pennilesse,'	1592
Henry VI., Part II.	. Printed as 'The First Part of the Contention,'	1594
Henry VI., Part III.	. Printed as 'The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York,'	1595
Richard II.	. Printed	1597
Richard III.	. Printed	1597
Romeo and Juliet	. Printed	1597
Love's Labour's Lost	. Printed	1598
Henry IV., Part I.	. Printed	1598
Henry IV., Part II.	. Printed	1600
Henry V.	. Printed	1600
Merchant of Venice	. Printed 1600. Mentioned by Meres	1598
Midsummer Night's Dream	. Printed 1600. Mentioned by Meres	1598
Much Ado about Nothing	. Printed	1600
As You Like It	. Entered at Stationers' Hall	1600
All's Well that Ends Well	. Held to be mentioned by Meres as 'Love's Labour's Won'.	1598
Two Gentlemen of Verona	. Mentioned by Meres	1598
Comedy of Errors	. Mentioned by Meres	1598
King John	. Mentioned by Meres	1598
Titus Andronicus	. Printed	1600
Merry Wives of Windsor	. Printed	1602
Hamlet	. Printed	1603
Twelfth Night	. Acted in the Middle Temple Hall	1602
Othello	. Acted at Harefield	1602
Measure for Measure	. Acted at Whitehall	1604
Lear	. Printed 1608. Acted at Whitehall	1607
Taming of the Shrew	. Supposed to have been acted at Henslow's Theatre, 1593. Entered at Stationers' Hall	1607
Troilus and Cressida	. Printed 1609. Previously acted at Court	1609
Pericles	. Printed	1609
The Tempest	. Acted at Whitehall	1611
The Winter's Tale	. Acted at Whitehall	1611
Henry VIII.	. Acted as a new play when the Globe was burned	1613

Out of the thirty-seven Plays of Shakspeare, the dates of thirty-one are thus to some extent fixed in epochs. These dates are, of course, to be modified by other circumstances. There are only six Plays remaining, whose dates are not thus limited by publication, by the notice of contemporaries, or by the record of their performances; and these certainly belong to the poet's latter period. They are

Macbeth.	Julius Cæsar.
Cymbeline.	Antony and Cleopatra.
Timon of Athens.	Coriolanus.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

TITUS ANDRONICUS.

THE external evidence that bears upon the authorship of 'Titus Andronicus' is of two kinds:—

1. The testimony which assigns the play to Shakspeare, wholly or in part.

2. The testimony which fixes the period of its original production.

The *direct* testimony of the first kind is unimpeachable: Francis Meres, a contemporary of Shakspeare—a man intimately acquainted with the literary history of his day—not writing even in the later period of Shakspeare's life, but as early as 1598—compares, for tragedy, the excellence of Shakspeare among the English, with Seneca among the Latins, and says, witness, "for tragedy, 'his Richard II.,' 'Richard III.,' 'Henry IV.,' 'King John,' 'Titus Andronicus,' and his 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

The *indirect* testimony is nearly as important. The play is printed in the first folio edition of the poet's collected works—an edition published within seven years after his death by his intimate friends and "fellows;" and that edition contains an entire scene not found in either of the previous quarto editions which have come down to us. That edition does not contain a single other play upon which a doubt of the authorship has been raised; for even those who deny the entire authorship of 'Henry VI.' to Shakspeare have no doubt as to the partial authorship.

Against this testimony of the editors of the first folio, that Shakspeare was the author of 'Titus Andronicus,' there is only one fact to be opposed—that his name is not on the title-page of either of the quarto editions, although those editions show us that it was acted by the company to which Shakspeare

belonged. But neither was the name of Shakspeare affixed to the first editions of 'Richard II.,' 'Richard III.,' and 'Henry IV., Part I.;" nor to the first three editions of 'Romeo and Juliet;' nor to 'Henry V.' These similar facts, therefore, leave the testimony of Hemings and Condell unimpeached.

We now come to the second point—the testimony which fixes the date of the original production of 'Titus Andronicus.' There are two modes of viewing this portion of the evidence; and we first present it with the interpretation which deduces from it that the tragedy was *not* written by Shakspeare.

Ben Jonson, in the Induction to his 'Bartholomew Fair,' first acted in 1614, says—"He that will swear 'Jeronimo,' or 'Andronicus,' are the best plays *yet*, shall pass unexcepted at here, as a man whose judgment shows it is constant, and hath stood still these five-and-twenty or thirty years. Though it be an ignorance, it is a virtuous and staid ignorance; and, next to truth, a confirmed error does well." Percy offers the following comment upon this passage, in his 'Reliques of Ancient Poetry:'—"There is reason to conclude that this play was rather improved by Shakespeare with a few fine touches of his pen, than originally written by him: for, not to mention that the style is less figurative than his others generally are, this tragedy is mentioned with discredit in the Induction to Ben Jonson's 'Bartholomew Fair,' in 1614, as one that had been then exhibited 'five-and-twenty or thirty years;' which, if we take the lowest number, throws it back to the year 1589, at which time Shakespeare was but 25: an earlier date than can be found for any other of his pieces." With the views we entertain as to the com-

mencement of Shakspeare's career as a dramatic author, the proof against his authorship of 'Titus Andronicus,' thus brought forward by Percy, is to us amongst the most convincing reasons for not hastily adopting the opinion that he was not its author. The external evidence of the authorship, and the external evidence of the date of the authorship, entirely coincide: each supports the other. The continuation of the argument derived from the early date of the play naturally runs into the internal evidence of its authenticity. The fact of its early date is indisputable; and here, for the present, we leave it.

We can scarcely subscribe to Mr. Hallam's strong opinion, given with reference to this question of the authorship of 'Titus Andronicus,' that, "in criticism of all kinds, we must acquire a dogged habit of resisting testimony, when *res ipsa per se vociferatur* to the contrary."* The *res ipsa* may be looked upon through very different media by different minds: *testimony*, when it is clear, and free from the suspicion of an interested bias, although it appear to militate against conclusions that, however strong, are not infallible, because they depend upon very nice analysis and comparison, *must* be received, more or less, and *cannot* be doggedly resisted. Mr. Hallam says, "'Titus Andronicus' is now, by common consent, denied to be, in *any* sense, a production of Shakspeare." Who are the interpreters of the "common consent?" Theobald, Johnson, Farmer, Steevens, Malone, M. Mason. These critics are wholly of one school; and we admit that they represent the "common consent" of their own school of English literature upon this point—till within a few years the only school. But there is another school of criticism, which maintains that 'Titus Andronicus' is in *every* sense a production of Shakspeare. The German critics, from W. Schlegel to Ulrici, agree to reject the "common consent" of the English critics. The subject, therefore, cannot be hastily dismissed; the external testimony cannot be doggedly resisted. But, in entering upon the examination of this question with the best care we can bestow, we con-

sider that it possesses an importance much higher than belongs to the proof, or disproof, from the internal evidence, that this painful tragedy was written by Shakspeare. The question is not an isolated one. It requires to be treated with a constant reference to the state of the early English drama,—the probable tendencies of the poet's own mind at the period of his first dramatic productions,—the circumstances amidst which he was placed with reference to his audiences,—the struggle which he must have undergone to reconcile the contending principles of the practical and the ideal, the popular and the true,—the tentative process by which he must have advanced to his immeasurable superiority over every contemporary. It is easy to place 'Titus Andronicus' by the side of 'Hamlet,' and to say,—the one is a low work of art, the other a work of the highest art. It is easy to say that the versification of 'Titus Andronicus' is not the versification of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream.' It is easy to say that Titus raves and denounces without moving terror or pity; but that Lear tears up the whole heart, and lays bare all the hidden springs of thought and passion that elevate madness into sublimity. But this, we venture to think, is not just criticism. We may be tempted, perhaps, to refine too much in rejecting all such sweeping comparisons; but what we have first to trace is relation, and not likeness:—if we find likeness in a single "trick or line," we may indeed add it to the evidence of relation. But relation may be established even out of dissimilarity. No one who has deeply contemplated the progress of the great intellects of the world, and has traced the doubts, and fears, and throes, and desperate plunges of genius, can hesitate to believe that excellence in art is to be attained by the same process through which we may hope to reach excellence in morals—by contest, and purification,—until habitual confidence and repose succeed to convulsive exertions and distracting aims. He that would rank amongst the heroes must have fought the good fight. *Energy* of all kinds has to work out its own subjection to principles, without which it can never become *power*. In the course of this struggle

* 'Literature of Europe,' vol. ii. p. 385.

what it produces may be essentially unlike to the fruits of its after-peacefulness:—for the good has to be reached through the evil—the true through the false—the universal through the partial. The passage we subjoin is from Franz Horn; and we think that it demands a respectful consideration:—

“A mediocre, poor, and tame nature *finds itself* easily. It soon arrives, when it endeavours earnestly, at a knowledge of what it can accomplish, and what it cannot. Its poetical tones are single and gentle spring-breathings; with which we are well pleased, but which pass over us almost trackless. A very different combat has the higher and richer nature to maintain with itself; and the more splendid the peace, and the brighter the clearness, which it reaches through this combat, the more monstrous the fight which must have been incessantly maintained.

“Let us consider the richest and most powerful poetic nature that the world has ever yet seen; let us consider Shakspeare, *as boy and youth*, in his circumscribed external situation,—without one discriminating friend, without a patron, without a teacher,—without the possession of ancient or modern languages,—in his loneliness at Stratford, following an uncongenial employment; and then, in the strange whirl of the so-called great world of London, contending for long years with unfavourable circumstances,—in wearisome intercourse with this great world, which is, however, often found to be little;—but also with nature, with himself, and with God:—What materials for the deepest contemplation! This rich nature, thus circumstanced, desires to explain the enigma of the human being and the surrounding world. But it is not yet disclosed to himself. Ought he to wait for this ripe time before he ventures to dramatise? Let us not demand anything super-human: for, through the expression of error in song, will he find what accelerates the truth; and well for him that he has no other sins to answer for than poetical ones, which later in life he has atoned for by the most glorious excellences!

“The elegiac tone of his juvenile poems allows us to imagine very deep passions in the youthful Shakspeare. But this single

tone was not long sufficient for him. He soon desired, from that stage ‘which signifies the world’ (an expression that Schiller might properly have invented for Shakspeare), to speak aloud what the world seemed to him,—to him, the youth who was not yet able thoroughly to penetrate this seeming. Can there be here a want of colossal errors? Not merely single errors. No: we should have a whole drama which is diseased at its very root,—which rests upon one single monstrous error. Such a drama is this ‘Titus.’ The poet had here nothing less in his mind than to give us a grand Doomsday-drama. But what, as a man, was possible to him in ‘Lear,’ the youth could not accomplish. He gives us a torn-to-pieces world, about which Fate wanders like a bloodthirsty lion, or as a more refined or more cruel tiger, tearing mankind, good and evil alike, and blindly treading down every flower of joy. Nevertheless a better feeling reminds him that some repose must be given; but he is not sufficiently confident of this, and what he does in this regard is of little power. The personages of the piece are not merely heathens, but most of them embittered and blind in their heathenism; and only some single aspirations of something better can arise from a few of the best among them;—aspirations which are breathed so gently as scarcely to be heard amidst the cries of desperation from the bloody waves that roar almost deafeningly.”

The eloquent critic adds, in a note,—“Is it not as if there sounded through the whole piece a comfortless complaint of the incomprehensible and hard lot of all earthly? Is it not as if we heard the poet speaking with Faust—‘All the miseries of mankind seize upon me?’ Or with his own ‘Hamlet,’—

‘How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on’t! O, fie! ’t is an unweeded garden
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in
nature
Possess it merely.’

“And now, let us bethink ourselves, in opposition to this terrible feeling, of the sweet blessed peacefulness which speaks from out of all the poet’s more matured dramas: for

instance, from the inexhaustibly joyfuled 'As You Like It.' Such a contest followed by such a victory!"

It is scarcely necessary to point out that this argument of the German critic is founded upon the simple and intelligible belief that Shakspeare is, in *every* sense of the word, the author of 'Titus Andronicus.' Here is no attempt to compromise the question, by the common English babble that "Shakspeare may have written a few lines in this play, or given some assistance to the author in revising it." This is Malone's opinion, founded upon an idle tradition, mentioned by Ravenscroft in the time of James II.,—a tradition contradicted by Ravenscroft himself, who, in a prologue to his alteration of 'Titus Andronicus,' says—

"To-day the poet does not fear your rage;
Shakespear, by him revived, now treads the stage."

In Malone's posthumous edition, by Boswell, "those passages in which he supposed the hand of Shakspeare may be traced are marked with inverted commas." This was the system which Malone pursued with 'Henry VI. ;' and, as we fully believe, it was founded upon a most egregious fallacy. The drama belongs to the province of the very highest poetical art; because a play which fully realizes the objects of a scenic exhibition requires a nicer combination of excellences, and involves higher difficulties, than belong to any other species of poetry. Taking the qualities of invention, power of language, versification, to be equal in two men, one devoting himself to dramatic poetry, and the other to narrative poetry, the dramatic poet has chances of failure which the narrative poet may entirely avoid. The dialogue, and especially the imagery, of the dramatic poet are secondary to the invention of the plot, the management of the action, and the conception of the characters. Language is but the drapery of the beings that the dramatic poet's imagination has created. They must be placed by the poet's power of combination in the various relations which they must maintain through a long and sometimes complicated action: he must see

the whole of that action vividly, with reference to its capacity of manifesting itself distinctly to an audience, so that even the deaf should partially comprehend: the pantomime must be acted over and over again in his mind, before the wand of the magician gives the agents voice. When all this is done, all contradictions reconciled, all obscurities made clear, the interest prolonged and heightened, and the catastrophe naturally evolved and matured, the poet, to use the terms of a sister-art, has completed that design which colour and expression are to make manifest to others with something like the distinctness with which he himself has seen it. We have no hesitation in believing that one of the main causes of Shakspeare's immeasurable superiority to other dramatists is that all-penetrating power of combination by which the action of his dramas is constantly sustained; whilst in the best pieces of his contemporaries, with rare exceptions, it flags or breaks down into description,—or is carried off by imagery,—or the force of conception in one character overpowers the management of the other instruments—cases equally evidencing that the poet has not attained the most difficult art of controlling his own conceptions. And thus it is that we so often hear Christopher Marlowe, or Philip Massinger,—to name the very best of them,—speaking themselves out of the mouths of their puppets, whilst the characterization is lost, and the action is forgotten. But when do we ever hear the individual voice of the man William Shakspeare? When does he come forward to bow to the audience, as it were, between the scenes? Never is there any pause with him, that we may see the complacent author whispering to his auditory—"This is not exactly what I meant; my inspiration carried me away; but is it not fine?" The great dramatic poet sits out of mortal ken. He rolls away the clouds and exhibits his world. There is calm and storm, and light and darkness; and the material scene becomes alive; and we see a higher life than that of our ordinary nature: and the whole soul is elevated; and man and his actions are presented under aspects more real than reality,

and our control over tears or laughter is taken away from us ; and, if the poet be a philosopher, — and without philosophy he cannot be a poet, — deep truths, before dimly seen, enter into our minds and abide there. Why do we state all this ? Utterly to reject the belief that Shakspeare was a line-maker : that, like Gray, for example, he was a manufacturer of mosaic poetry ; — that he made verses to order : — and that his verses could be produced by some other process than an entire conception of, and power over, the *design* of a drama. It is this mistake which lies at the bottom of all that has been written and believed about the two Parts of 'The Contention of the Houses of York and Lancaster' being polished by Shakspeare into the Second and Third Parts of 'Henry VI.' The elder plays — which the English antiquarian critics persist in ascribing to Marlowe, or Greene, or Peele, or all of them — contain all the action, even to the exact succession of the scenes, all the characterization, a very great deal of the dialogue, including the most vigorous thoughts : and then Shakspeare was to take the matter in hand, and add a thousand lines or two up and down, correct an epithet here and there, and do all this without the slightest exercise of invention, either in movement or characterization ; producing fine lines without passing through that process of inspiration by which lines having dramatic beauty and propriety can alone be produced. We say this, after much deliberation, not only with reference to the 'Henry VI.' and to the play before us, but with regard to the general belief that Shakspeare, in the outset of his career, was a mender of the plays of other men. 'Timon,' according to our belief, is the only exception ; and we regard that not as an exception to the principle, because there the characterization of Timon himself is the Shaksperian creation ; and that depends extremely little upon the general action, which, to a large extent, is episodic.

But we must guard ourselves from being understood to deny that many of the earliest plays of Shakspeare were founded upon some rude production of the primitive stage. Andronicus had, no doubt, its dramatic ances-

tor, who exhibited the same Gothic view of Roman history, and whose scenes of blood were equally agreeable to an audience requiring strong excitement. 'Pericles,' however remodelled at an after period, belonged, we can scarcely doubt, to Shakspeare's first efforts for the improvement of some popular dramatic exhibition which he found ready to his hand. So of 'The Taming of the Shrew,' of which we may without any violence assume that a common model existed both for that and for the other play with a very similar name, which appears to belong to the same period. From the first, Shakspeare, with that consummate judgment which gave a fitness to everything that he did, or proposed to do, held his genius in subjection to the apprehension of the people, till he felt secure of their capability to appreciate the highest excellence. In his case, as in that of every great artist, perfection could only be attained by repeated efforts. He had no models to work upon ; and in the very days in which he lived the English drama began to be created. It was not "Learning's triumph o'er her barbarous foes" which "first rear'd the stage," but a singular combination of circumstances which for the most part grew out of the reformation of religion. He took the thing as he found it. The dramatic power was in him so supreme that, compared with the feeble personifications of other men, it looks like instinct. He seized upon the vague abstractions which he found in the histories and comedies of the Blackfriars and the Bel Savage, and the scene was henceforth filled with living beings. But not as yet were these individualities surrounded with the glowing atmosphere of burning poetry. The philosophy which invests their sayings with an universal wisdom that enters the mind and becomes its loadstar was scarcely yet evoked out of that profound contemplation of human actions and of the higher things dimly revealed in human nature, which belonged to the maturity of his wondrous mind. The wit was there in some degree from the first, for it was irrepressible ; but it was then as the polished metal, which dazzlingly gives back the brightness of the

sunbeams ; in after times it was as the diamond, which reflects everything, and yet appears to be self-irradiated in its lustrous depths. If these qualities, and if the humour which seems more especially the ripened growth of the mental faculty, could have been produced in the onset of Shakspeare's career, it is probable that the career would not have been a successful one. He had to make his audience. He himself has told us of a play of his earliest period, that "I remember pleased not the million ; 'twas caviarie to the general : but it was (as I received it, and others, whose judgments in such matters cried in the top of mine) an excellent play ; well digested in the scenes ; set down with as much modesty as cunning. I remember, one said there were no sallies in the lines to make the matter savoury ; nor no matter in the phrase that might indite the author of affectation ; but called it an honest method, as wholesome as sweet, and by very much more handsome than fine." * Was this play an attempt of Shakspeare himself to depart from the popular track ? If it were, we probably owe much to the million.

We hold, then, that Malone's principle of marking with inverted commas those passages in which he supposed the hand of Shakspeare might be traced in this play of 'Titus Andronicus' is based upon a vital error. It is not with us a question whether the passages which Malone has marked exhibit, or not, the critic's poetical taste : we say that the passages could not have been written except by the man, whoever he be, who conceived the action and the characterization. Take the single example of the character of Tamora. She is the presiding genius of the piece ; and in her we see, as we believe, the outbreak of that wonderful conception of the union of powerful intellect and moral depravity which Shakspeare was afterwards to make manifest with such consummate wisdom. Strong passions, ready wit, perfect self-possession, and a sort of oriental imagination, take Tamora out of the class of ordinary women. It is in her mouth that we find, for the most part, what readers of Malone's school would call the poetical

* 'Hamlet,' Act II., Sc. II.

language of the play. We will select a few specimens (Act II., Scene 3) :—

"The birds chant melody on every bush ;
The snake lies rolled in the cheerful sun ;
The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind,
And make a chequer'd shadow on the ground :
Under their sweet shade, Aaron, let us sit,
And—whilst the babbling echo mocks the
hounds,
Replying shrilly to the well-tuned horns,
As if a double hunt were heard at once—
Let us sit down."

Again, in the same scene :—

"A barren detested vale, you see, it is :
The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and
lean,
O'ercome with moss and baleful misseltoe.
Here never shines the sun ; here nothing
breeds,
Unless the nightly owl, or fatal raven.
And, when they show'd me this abhorred pit,
They told me, here, at dead time of the night,
A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes,
Ten thousand swelling toads, as many urchins,
Would make such fearful and confused cries,
As any mortal body, hearing it,
Should straight fall mad, or else die sud-
denly."

In Act IV., Scene 4 :—

"King, be thy thoughts imperious, like thy
name.
Is the sun dimm'd, that gnats do fly in it ?
The eagle suffers little birds to sing,
And is not careful what they mean thereby ;
Knowing that, with the shadow of his wing,
He can at pleasure stint their melody."

And, lastly, where the lines are associated with the high imaginative conception of the speaker, that she was to personate Revenge :—

"Know thou, sad man, I am not Tamora ;
She is thy enemy, and I thy friend :
I am Revenge ; sent from the infernal king-
dom,
To ease the gnawing vulture of thy mind,
By working wreakful vengeance on thy foes.
Come down, and welcome me to this world's
light."

The first two of these passages are marked by Malone as the additions of Shakspeare to the work of an inferior poet. If we had

adopted Malone's theory, we should have marked the two other passages; and have gone even further in our selection of the poetical lines spoken by Tamora. But we hold that the lines could not have been produced, according to Malone's theory, even by Shakspeare. Poetry, and especially dramatic poetry, is not to be regarded as a bit of joiner's work—or, if you please, as an affair of jewelling and enamelling. The lines which we have quoted may not be amongst Shakspeare's highest things; but they could not have been produced except under the excitement of the full swing of his dramatic power—bright touches dashed in at the very hour when the whole design was growing into shape upon the canvass, and the form of Tamora was becoming alive with colour and expression. To imagine that the great passages of a drama are produced like "a copy of verses," under any other influence than the large and general inspiration which creates the whole drama, is, we believe, utterly to mistake the essential nature of dramatic poetry. It would be equally just to say that the nice but well-defined traits of character, which stand out from the physical horrors of this play, when it is carefully studied, were superadded by Shakspeare to the coarser delineations of some other man. Aaron, the Moor, in his general conception is an unmitigated villain—something alien from humanity—a fiend, and therefore only to be detested. But Shakspeare, by that insight which, however imperfectly developed, must have distinguished his earliest efforts, brings Aaron into the circle of humanity; and then he is a thing which moves us, and his punishment is poetical justice. One touch does this—his affection for his child:

"Come on, you thick-lipp'd slave, I'll bear you hence;

For it is you that puts us to our shifts:

I'll make you feed on berries, and on roots,
And feed on curds and whey, and suck the goat,

And cabin in a cave; and bring you up
To be a warrior, and command a camp."

Did Shakspeare put in these lines, and the previous ones which evolve the same feeling, under the system of a cool editorial mending

of a second man's work? The system may do for an article; but a play is another thing. Did Shakspeare put these lines into the mouth of Lucius, when he calls to his son to weep over the body of Titus?—

"Come hither, boy; come, come, and learn of us
To melt in showers: Thy grandsire lov'd thee well:

Many a time he danced thee on his knee,
Sung thee asleep, his loving breast thy pillow;
Many a matter hath he told to thee,
Meet and agreeing with thine infancy;
In that respect then, like a loving child,
Shed yet some small drops from thy tender spring,

Because kind nature doth require it so."

Malone has not marked these; they are too simple to be included in his poetical gems. But are they not full to overflowing of those deep thoughts of human love which the great poet of the affections has sent into so many welcoming hearts? Malone marks with his commas the address to the tribunes at the beginning of the third act. The lines are lofty and rhetorical; and a poet who had undertaken to make set speeches to another man's characters might perhaps have added these. Dryden and Tate did this service for Shakspeare himself. But Malone does not mark *one* line which has no rhetoric in it, and does not *look* like poetry. The old man has given his hand to the treacherous Aaron, that he may save the lives of his sons; but the messenger brings him the heads of those sons. It is for Marcus and Lucius to burst into passion. The father, for some space, speaks not; and then he speaks but one line:—

"When will this fearful slumber have an end?"

Did Shakspeare make this line to order? The poet who wrote the line conceived the whole situation, and he could not have conceived the situation unless the whole dramatic movement had equally been his conception. Such things must be wrought out of the red-heat of the whole material—not filled up out of cold fragments.

Accepting 'Titus' as a play produced somewhere about the middle of the ninth decade of the sixteenth century, it possesses

other peculiarities than such as we have noticed, which, upon the system of Malone's inverted commas, would take away a very considerable number from the supposed original fabricator of the drama, and bestow them upon the reviser. We must extract a passage from Malone before we proceed to point out these other peculiarities:—"To enter into a long disquisition to prove this piece not to have been written by Shakspeare would be an idle waste of time. To those who are not conversant with his writings, if particular passages were examined, more words would be necessary than the subject is worth; those who are well acquainted with his works cannot entertain a doubt on the question. I will, however, mention one mode by which it may be easily ascertained. Let the reader only peruse a few lines of 'Appius and Virginia,' 'Tancred and Gismund,' 'The Battle of Alcazar,' 'Jeronimo,' 'Selimus, Emperor of the Turks,' 'The Wounds of Civil War,' 'The Wars of Cyrus,' 'Lochrine,' 'Arden of Feversham,' 'King Edward I.,' 'The Spanish Tragedy,' 'Solyman and Perseda,' 'King Leir,' the old 'King John,' or any other of the pieces that were exhibited before the time of Shakspeare, and he will at once perceive that 'Titus Andronicus' was coined in the same mint." What Malone requests to be perused is limited to "a few lines" of these old plays; if he could have bestowed many words upon the subject, he would have examined "particular passages." Such an examination has of course reference only to the versification. It is scarcely necessary to say that we do not agree with the assumption that the pieces Malone has mentioned were exhibited "before the time of Shakspeare." It is difficult, if not impossible, to settle the exact time of many of these; but we do know that one of the plays here mentioned belongs to the same epoch as 'Titus Andronicus.' "He that will swear 'Jeronimo,' or 'Andronicus,' are the best plays yet, shall pass unexcepted at here, as a man whose judgment shows it is constant, and hath stood still these five-and-twenty or thirty years." We shall confine, therefore, any comparison of the versification of 'Titus Andronicus' entirely to that of 'Jeronimo.'

'Titus Andronicus' contains very few couplets, a remarkable thing in so early a play. Of 'Jeronimo' one-half is rhyme. Of the blank verse of 'Jeronimo' we will quote a passage which is, perhaps, the least monotonous of that tragedy, and which Mr. Collier has quoted in his 'History of Dramatic Poetry,' pointing out that "Here we see trochees used at the ends of the lines, and the pauses are even artfully managed; while redundant syllables are inserted, and lines left defective, still farther to add to the variety:"—

"Come, valiant spirits*; you peers of Portugal,
That owe your lives, your faiths, and services,
To set you free from base captivity:
O let our father's scandal ne'er be seen
As a base blush upon our free-born cheeks:
Let all the tribute that proud Spain received
Of those all captive Portugales deceased,
Turn into chafe, and choke their insolence.
Methinks no moiety, not one little thought,
Of them whose servile acts live in their graves,
But should raise spleens big as a cannon-
bullet
Within your bosoms: O for honour,
Your country's reputation, your lives' freedom,
Indeed your all that may be term'd revenge,
Now let your bloods be liberal as the sea;
And all those wounds that you receive of
Spain,
Let theirs be equal to quit yours again.
Speak, Portugales: are you resolved as I,
To live like captives, or as free-born die?"

We have no hesitation in saying (in opposition to Malone's opinion) that the freedom of versification which is discovered in 'Titus Andronicus' is carried a great deal further than even this specimen of 'Jeronimo;' and we cannot have a better proof of our assertion than this—that Steevens anxiously desired, and indeed succeeded, in reducing several of the lines to the exact dimensions of his ten-syllable measuring-tape. The Shaksperian versification is sufficiently marked in 'Titus,' even to the point of offending the critic who did not understand it. But the truth of the matter is, that the comparison of the versification of 'Titus' with

* Ordinarily pronounced in early dramatic poetry as a monosyllable.

the old plays mentioned by Malone is altogether a fallacy. Like the 'Henry VI.' it wants, for the most part, the

"Linked sweetness long drawn out."

of the later plays, and so do 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona,' and 'The Comedy of Errors.' But to compare the play, as a whole, even with 'Jeronimo' (and Kyd, in freedom and variety of rhythm, whatever he may want in majesty, is superior to Marlowe) argues, we think, an incompetent knowledge of the things compared. To compare it with the old 'King Leir,' and the greater number of the plays in Malone's list, is to compare the movement of the hunter with that of the horse in the mill. The truth is, that, after the first scene of 'Andronicus,' in which the author sets out with the stately pace of his time, we are very soon carried away, by the power of the language, the variety of the pause, and the especial freedom with which trochees are used at the ends of lines, to forget that the versification is not *altogether* upon the best Shakspearean model. There is the same instrument, but the performer has not yet thoroughly learnt its scope and its power.

Horn has a very just remark on the language of 'Titus Andronicus':—"Foremost we may recognise with praise the almost never-wearying power of the language, wherein no *shift* is ever used. We know too well how often, in many French and German tragedies, the princes and princesses satisfy themselves to silence with a necessary *Hélas! Oh Ciel! O Schicksal!* (O Fate!) and similar cheap outcries: but Shakspeare is quite another man, who, for every degree of pain, knew how to give the right tone and the right colour. In the bloody sea of this drama, in which men can scarcely keep themselves afloat, this, without doubt, must have been peculiarly difficult." We regard this decided language, this absence of stage conventionalities, as one of the results of the power which the poet possessed of distinctly conceiving his situations with reference to his characters. The *Oh's!* and *Ah's!* and *Heavens!* of the English stage, as well as the *O Ciel!* of the French, are a consequence

of feebleness, exhibiting itself in common-places. The greater number of the *old* English dramatists, to do them justice, had the same power as the author of 'Titus Andronicus' of grappling with words which they thought fitting to the situations. But their besetting sin was in the constant use of that "huffing, braggart, puft" language, which Shakspeare never employs in the dramas which all agree to call his, and of which there is a very sparing portion even in 'Titus Andronicus.' The temptation to employ it must have been great indeed; for when, in every scene, the fearful energies of the action

"On horror's head horrors accumulate,"

it must have required no common forbearance, and therefore no common power, to prescribe that the words of the actors should not

"Outface the brow of bragging horror."

The son of Tamora is to be killed; as he is led away, she exclaims—

"Oh! cruel, irreligious piety!"

Titus kills Mutius: the young man's brother earnestly says—

"My lord, you are unjust."

When Tamora prescribes their terrible wickedness to her sons, Lavinia remonstrates—

"O! Tamora, thou bear'st a woman's face."

When Marcus encounters his mutilated niece, there is much poetry, but no raving. When woe upon woe is heaped upon Titus, we have no imprecations:—

"For now I stand as one upon a rock,
Environ'd with a wilderness of sea;
Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by
wave,
Expecting ever when some envious surge
Will in his brinish bowels swallow him."

In one situation, after Titus has lost his hand, Marcus says—

"Oh! brother, speak with possibilities,
And do not break into these deep extremes."

What are the deep extremes? The unhappy

man has scarcely risen into metaphor, much less into braggardism:—

“O, here I lift this one hand up to heaven,
And bow this feeble ruin to the earth:
If any power pities wretched tears,
To that I call:—What, wilt thou kneel with
me? [To LAVINIA.
Do then, dear heart; for heaven shall hear our
prayers:
Or with our sighs we'll breathe the welkin
dim,
And stain the sun with fog, as sometime
clouds,
When they do hug him in their melting
bosoms.”

And in his very crowning agony we hear only—

“Why, I have not another tear to shed.”

It has been said, “There is not a shade of difference between the two Moors, Eleazar and Aaron.”* Eleazar is a character in ‘Lust’s Dominion,’ incorrectly attributed to Marlowe. Trace the cool, determined, sarcastic, remorseless villain, Aaron, through these blood-spilling scenes, and see if he speaks in “King Cambyzes’ vein,” as Eleazar speaks in the following lines:—

“Now, Tragedy, thou minion of the night,
Rhamnusia’s pew-fellow, to thee I’ll sing
Upon an harp made of dead Spanish bones—
The proudest instrument the world affords;
When thou in crimson jollity shall bathe
Thy limbs, as black as mine, in springs of
blood
Still gushing from the conduit-head of Spain.
To thee that never blushest, though thy cheeks
Are full of blood, O Saint Revenge, to thee
I consecrate my murders, all my stabs,
My bloody labours, tortures, stratagems,
The volume of all wounds that wound from
me,—
Mine is the Stage, thine the Tragedy.”

But enough of this. It appears to us manifest that, although the author of ‘Titus Andronicus’ did choose—in common with the best and the most popular of those who wrote for the early stage, but contrary to his after-practice—a subject which should present to his comparatively rude audiences the excite-

ment of a succession of physical horrors, he was so far under the control of his higher judgment, that, avoiding their practice, he steadily abstained from making his “verses jet on the stage in tragical buskins; every word filling the mouth like the faburden of Bow-Bell, daring God out of heaven with that atheist Tamburlaine, or blaspheming with the mad priest of the sun.”†

It is easy to understand how Shakspeare, at the period when he first entered upon those labours which were to build up a glorious fabric out of materials that had been previously used for the basest purposes,—without models,—at first, perhaps, not voluntarily choosing his task, but taking the business that lay before him so as to command popular success,—ignorant, to a great degree, of the height and depth of his own intellectual resources,—not seeing, or dimly seeing, how poetry and philosophy were to elevate and purify the common staple of the coarse drama about him,—it is easy to conceive how a story of fearful bloodshed should force itself upon him as a thing that he could work into something better than the dumb show and fiery words of his predecessors and contemporaries. It was in after-years that he had to create the tragedy of passion. Lamb has beautifully described Webster, as almost alone having the power “to move a horror skilfully, to touch a soul to the quick, to lay upon fear as much as it can bear, to wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop, and then step in with mortal instruments to take its last forfeit.” Lamb adds, “Writers of inferior genius mistake quantity for quality.” The remark is quite true,—when examples of the higher tragedy are accessible, and when the people have learnt better than to require the grosser stimulant. Before Webster had written ‘The Duchess of Malfi’ and ‘Vittoria Corombona,’ Shakspeare had produced ‘Lear’ and ‘Othello.’ But there were writers, *not* of inferior genius, who had committed the same mistake as the author of ‘Titus Andronicus’—who use blood as they would “the paint of the property-man in the theatre.” Need we mention other names than Marlowe and Kyd? The “old Jeronimo,” as Ben Jonson calls it,

* C. A. Brown’s ‘Autobiographical Poems of Shakspeare.’

† Greene, 1588.

—perhaps the most popular play of the early stage, and, in many respects, a work of great power,—thus concludes, with a sort of Chorus spoken by a ghost:—

“Ay, now my hopes have end in their effects,
When blood and sorrow finish my desires.
Horatio murder'd in his father's bower;
Vile Serberine by Pedringano slain;
False Pedringano hang'd by quaint device;
Fair Isabella by herself misdone;
Prince Balthazar by Belimperia stabb'd;
The Duke of Castille, and his wicked son,
Both done to death by old Hieronimo,
By Belimperia fallen, as Dido fell;
And good Hieronimo slain by himself:
Ay, these were spectacles to please my soul.”

Here is murder enough to match even ‘Andronicus.’ This slaughtering work was accompanied with another peculiarity of the unformed drama—the dumb show. Words were sometimes scarcely necessary for the exposition of the story; and, when they were, no great care was taken that they should be very appropriate or beautiful in themselves. Thomas Heywood, himself a prodigious manufacturer of plays in a more advanced period, writing as late as 1612, seems to look upon these semi-pageants, full of what the actors call “bustle,” as the wonderful things of the modern stage:—“To see, as I have seen, Hercules, in his own shape, hunting the boar, knocking down the bull, taming the hart, fighting with Hydra, murdering Geryon, slaughtering Diomed, wounding the Stymphalides, killing the Centaurs, pashing the lion, squeezing the dragon, dragging Cerberus in chains, and, lastly, on his high pyramides writing *Nil ultra*—oh, these were sights to make an Alexander.”* With a stage that presented attractions like these to the multitude, is it wonderful that the young Shakspeare should have written a Tragedy of Horrors?

But Shakspeare, it is maintained, has given us no other tragedy constructed upon the principle of ‘Titus Andronicus.’ Are we quite sure? Do we know what the first ‘Hamlet’ was? We have one sketch, which may be most instructively compared with

the finished performance; but it has been conjectured, and we think with perfect propriety, that the ‘Hamlet’ which was on the stage in 1589, and then sneered at by Nash, “has perished, and that the quarto of 1603 gives us the work in an intermediate state between the rude youthful sketch and the perfected ‘Hamlet,’ which was published in 1604.”† All the *action* of the perfect ‘Hamlet’ is to be found in the sketch published in 1603; but the profundity of the character is not all there,—very far from it. We have little of the thoughtful philosophy, of the morbid feelings, of Hamlet. But let us imagine an earlier sketch, where that wonderful creation of Hamlet’s character may have been still more unformed; where the poet may have simply proposed to exhibit in the young man a desire for revenge, combined with irresolution—perhaps even actual madness. Make Hamlet a common dramatic character, instead of one of the subtlest of metaphysical problems, and what is the tragedy? A tragedy of blood. It offends us not now, softened as it is, and almost hidden, in the atmosphere of poetry and philosophy which surrounds it. But look at it merely with reference to the *action*; and of what materials is it made? A ghost described; a ghost appearing; the play within a play, and that a play of murder; Polonius killed; the ghost again; Ophelia mad and self-destroyed; the struggle at the grave between Hamlet and Laertes; the queen poisoned; Laertes killed with a poisoned rapier; the king killed by Hamlet; and, last of all, Hamlet’s death. No wonder Fortinbras exclaims—

“This quarry cries on havoc.”

Again, take another early tragedy, of which we may well believe that there was an earlier sketch than that published in 1597—‘Romeo and Juliet.’ We may say of the delicious poetry, as Romeo says of Juliet’s beauty, that it makes the charnel-house “a feasting presence full of light.” But imagine a ‘Romeo and Juliet’ conceived in the immaturity of the young Shakspeare’s power—a tale of love, but surrounded with horror.

* ‘An Apology for Actors.’

† ‘Edinburgh Review,’ vol. lxxi. p. 475.

There is enough for the excitement of an uninstructed audience: the contest between the houses; Mercutio killed; Tybalt killed; the apparent death of Juliet; Paris killed in the churchyard; Romeo swallowing poison; Juliet stabbing herself. The marvel is, that the surpassing power of the poet should make us forget that 'Romeo and Juliet' can present such an aspect. All the changes which

we know Shakspeare made in 'Hamlet,' and 'Romeo and Juliet,' were to work out the peculiar theory of his mature judgment—that the terrible should be held, as it were, in solution by the beautiful, so as to produce a tragic consistent with pleasurable emotion. Herein he goes far beyond Webster. His art is a higher art.

CHAPTER II.

PERICLES.

THE *external* testimony that Shakspeare was the author of 'Pericles' would appear to rest upon strong evidence; it was published with Shakspeare's name as the author during his lifetime. But this evidence is not decisive. In 1600 was printed 'The first part of the true and honourable history of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle, &c. Written by William Shakespeare;'* and we should be entitled to receive that representation of the writer of 'Sir John Oldcastle' as good evidence of the authorship, were we not in possession of a fact which entirely outweighs the bookseller's insertion of a popular name in his title-page. In the manuscript diary of Philip Henslowe, preserved at Dulwich College, is the following entry:—"This 16 of October, 99, Receved by me, Thomas Downton, of Phillip Henslow, to pay Mr. Monday, Mr. Drayton, and Mr. Wilson and Hathway, for the first pte of the Lyfe of Sr Jhon Ouldcastell, and in earnest of the Second Pte, for the use of the compayny, ten pownd, I say receved 10 li."† The title-page of 'Pericles,' in 1609, might have been as fraudulent as that of 'Sir John Oldcastle' in 1600.

The play of 'Pericles,' as we learn by the original title-page, was "sundry times acted by his Majesty's servants at the Globe." The proprietary interest in the play for the purposes of the stage (whoever wrote it) no

doubt remained in 1623 with the proprietors of the Globe Theatre—Shakspeare's fellow-shareholders. Of the popularity of 'Pericles' there can be no doubt. It was printed three times separately before the publication of the folio of 1623; and it would have been to the interest of the proprietors of that edition to have included it amongst Shakspeare's works. Did they reject it because they could not conscientiously affirm it to be written by him, or were they unable to make terms with those who had the right of publication?

It is a most important circumstance, with reference to the authenticity of 'Titus Andronicus,' that Meres, in 1599, ascribed that play to Shakspeare. We have no such testimony in the case of 'Pericles;' but the tradition which assigns it to Shakspeare is pretty constant. Malone has quoted a passage from 'The Times displayed, in Six Sestiads,' a poem published in 1646, and dedicated by S. Shephard to Philip, Earl of Pembroke:—

"See him, whose tragic scenes Euripides
Doth equal, and with Sophocles we may
Compare great Shakspeare: Aristophanes
Never like him his fancy could display:
Witness The Prince of Tyre, his Pericles:
His sweet and his to be admired lay
He wrote of lustful Tarquin's rape, shows he
Did understand the depth of poesie."

Six years later, another writer, J. Tatham, in verses prefixed to Richard Brome's 'Jovial

* "Some of the copies have not Shakespeare's name on the title." COLLIER.

† 'Diary of Philip Henslowe;' edited by J. Payne Collier.

Crew,' 1652, speaks slightly of Shakspeare, and of this particular drama:—

“But Shakespeare, the plebeian driller, was
Founder'd in his Pericles, and must not pass.”

Dryden, in his prologue to Charles Davenant's 'Circe,' in 1675, has these lines:—

“Your Ben and Fletcher, in their first young
flight,
Did no Volpone, nor no Arbaces, write;
But hopp'd about, and short excursions made
From bough to bough, as if they were afraid,
And each was guilty of some slighted maid.
Shakspeare's own Muse his Pericles first bore;
The Prince of Tyre was elder than the Moor.
'T is miracle to see a first good play:
All hawthorns do not bloom on Christmas-
day.”

The mention of Shakspeare as the author of 'Pericles' in the poems printed in 1646 and 1652 may in some respect be called traditional; for the play was not printed after 1635, till it appeared in the folio of 1664. Dryden, most probably, read the play in that folio edition. Mr. Collier says, “I do not at all rely upon Dryden's evidence farther than to establish the belief as to the authorship entertained by persons engaged in theatrical affairs after the Restoration.” But is such evidence wholly to be despised? and must the belief be necessarily dated “after the Restoration?” Dryden was himself forty-four years of age when he wrote “Shakspeare's own Muse,” &c. He had been a writer for the stage twelve years. He was the friend of Davenant, who wrote for the stage in 1626. Of the original actors in Shakspeare's plays Dryden himself might have known, when he was a young man, John Lowin, who kept the Three Pigeons Inn at Brentford, and died very old, a little before the Restoration; and Joseph Taylor, who died in 1653, although, according to the tradition of the stage, he was old enough to have played Hamlet under Shakspeare's immediate instruction; and Richard Robinson, who served in the army of Charles I., and has an historical importance through having been shot to death by Harrison, after he had laid down his arms, with this exclamation from the stern republican, “Cursed is he that doth the work of

the Lord negligently.” It is impossible to doubt then that Dryden was a competent reporter of the traditions of the stage, and not necessarily of the traditions that survived after the Restoration. We can picture the young poet, naturally anxious to approach as closely to Shakspeare as possible, taking a cheerful cup with poor Lowin in his humble inn, and listening to the old man's recital of the recollections of his youth amidst those scenes from which he was banished by the violence of civil war and the fury of puritanical intolerance. We accept, then, Dryden's assertion with little doubt; and we approach to the examination of the *internal* evidence of the authenticity of 'Pericles' with the conviction that, if it be the work of Shakspeare, the foundations of it were laid when his art was imperfect, and he laboured somewhat in subjection to the influence of those ruder models for which he eventually substituted his own splendid examples of dramatic excellence.

There is a very striking passage in Sidney's 'Defence of Poesy,' which may be taken pretty accurately to describe the infancy of the dramatic art in England, being written some four or five years before we can trace any connection of Shakspeare with the stage. The passage is long, but it is deserving of attentive consideration:—

“But they will say, how then shall we set forth a story which contains both many places and many times? And do they not know that a tragedy is tied to the laws of Poesy, and not of History, not bound to follow the story, but having liberty either to feign a quite new matter, or to frame the history to the most tragical convenience? Again, many things may be told which cannot be showed: if they know the difference betwixt reporting and representing. As for example, I may speak, though I am here, of Peru, and in speech digress from that to the description of Calecut: but in action I cannot represent it without Pacolet's horse. And so was the manner the ancients took by some *Nuntius*, to recount things done in former time, or other place.

“Lastly, if they will represent an History, they must not (as Horace saith) begin above,

but they must come to the principal point of that one action which they will represent. By example this will be best expressed. I have a story of young Polydorus, delivered, for safety's sake, with great riches, by his father Priamus, to Polymnestor, king of Thrace, in the Trojan war time. He, after some years, hearing of the overthrow of Priamus, for to make the treasure his own, murdereth the child; the body of the child is taken up; Hecuba, she, the same day, findeth a sleight to be revenged most cruelly of the tyrant. Where, now, would one of our tragedy-writers begin, but with the delivery of the child? Then should he sail over into Thrace, and to spend I know not how many years, and travel numbers of places. But where doth Euripides? Even with the finding of the body, leaving the rest to be told by the spirit of Polydorus. This needs no farther to be enlarged; the dullest wit may conceive it."

Between this notion which Sidney had formed of the propriety of a tragedy which should understand "the difference betwixt reporting and representing," there was a long space to be travelled over, before we should arrive at a tragedy which should make the whole action manifest, and keep the interest alive from the first line to the last without any "reporting" at all. When 'Hamlet' and 'Othello' and 'Lear' were perfected, this culminating point of the dramatic art had been reached. But it is evident that Sidney described a state of things in which even the very inartificial expedient of uniting description with representation had not been thoroughly understood, or at least had not been generally practised. The "tragedy-writers" begin with the delivery of the young Polydorus, and travel on with him from place to place, till his final murder. At this point Euripides begins the story, leaving something to be told by the spirit of Polydorus. It is not difficult to conceive a young dramatic poet looking to something beyond the "tragedy-writers" of his own day, and, upon taking up a popular story, inventing a machinery for "reporting," which should emulate the ingenious device of Euripides in making the ghost of Polydorus briefly tell the history which a ruder stage would have exhi-

bited in detail. There was a book no doubt familiar to that young poet; it was the 'Confessio Amantis, the Confessyon of the Louer,' of John Gower, printed by Caxton in 1493, and by Berthelet in 1532 and 1554. That the book was popular, the fact of the publication of three editions in little more than half a century will sufficiently manifest. That it was a book to be devoured by a youth of poetical aspirations, who can doubt? That a Chaucer and a Gower were accessible to a young man educated at the grammar-school at Stratford, we may readily believe. That was not a day of rare copies; the bountiful press of the early English printers was for the people, and the people eagerly devoured the intellectual food which that press bestowed upon them. 'Appollinus, The Prince of Tyr,' is one of the most sustained, and, perhaps, altogether one of the most interesting, of the old narratives which Gower introduced into the poetical form. What did it matter to the young and enthusiastic reader that there were Latin manuscripts of this story as early as the tenth century; that there is an Anglo-Saxon version of it; that it forms one of the most elaborate stories of the 'Gesta Romanorum?' What does all this matter even to us, with regard to the play before us? Mr. Collier says, "The immediate source to which Shakespeare resorted was probably Laurence Twine's version of the novel of 'Appollonius, King of Tyre,' which first came out in 1576, and was afterwards several times reprinted. I have before me an edition without date, 'Imprinted at London by Valentine Simmes for the widow Newman,' which very likely was that used by our great dramatist."* Mr. Collier has reprinted this story of Laurence Twine with the title—'Appollonius, Prince of Tyre: upon which Shakespeare founded Pericles.' We cannot understand this. We have looked in vain throughout this story to find a single incident in 'Pericles,' suggested by Twine's relation, which might not have been equally suggested by Gower's poem. We will not weary our readers, therefore, with any extracts from this narrative. That the author of 'Pericles' had Gower in his thoughts, and, what is more important, that he felt that

* 'Farther Particulars,' p. 33.

his audience were familiar with Gower, is, we think, sufficiently apparent. Upon what other principle can Gower perpetually take up the dropped threads of the action? Upon what other principle are the verses spoken by Gower, amounting to several hundred lines, formed upon a careful imitation of his style; so as to present to an audience at the latter end of the sixteenth century some notion of a poet about two centuries older? It is perfectly evident to us that Gower, and Gower only, was in the thoughts of the author of 'Pericles.'

We call the play before us by the name of 'PERICLES,' because it was so called in the first rudely printed copies, and because the contemporaries of the writer, following the printed copies, so called it in their printed books. But Malone has given us an epigram of Richard Flecknoe, 1670, 'On the Play of the Life of PYROCLES.' There can be little doubt, we think, as Steevens has very justly argued, that Pyrocles was the name of the hero of this play. For who was Pyrocles? The hero of Sidney's 'Arcadia.' Steevens says, "It is remarkable that many of our ancient writers were ambitious to exhibit Sidney's worthies on the stage; and, when his subordinate agents were advanced to such honour, how happened it that Pyrocles, their leader, should be overlooked?" To a young poet, who, probably, had access to the 'Arcadia,' in manuscript, before its publication in 1590, the name of Pyrocles would naturally present itself as worthy to succeed the somewhat unmanageable Appollinus of Gower; and that name would recommend itself to an audience who, if they were of the privileged circles, such as the actors of the Blackfriars often addressed, were familiar with the 'Arcadia' before its publication. After 1590 the 'Arcadia' was the most popular work of the age.

It will be seen, then, that we advocate the belief that 'Pyrocles,' or 'Pericles,' was a very early work of Shakspeare, in some form, however different from that which we possess. That it was an early work, we are constrained to believe; not from the evidence of particular passages, which may be deficient in power, or devoid of refinement, but from the entire con-

struction of the dramatic action. The play is essentially one of movement, which is a great requisite for dramatic success; but that movement is not held in subjection to a unity of idea. The writer, in constructing the plot, had not arrived to a perfect conception of the principle "That a tragedy is tied to the laws of Poesy, and not of History, not bound to follow the story, but having liberty either to feign a quite new matter, or to frame the history to the most tragical convenience." But with this essential disadvantage we cannot doubt that, even with very imperfect dialogue, the action presented a succession of scenes of very absorbing interest. The introduction of Gower, however inartificial it may seem, was the result of very profound skill. The presence of Gower supplied the unity of idea which the desultory nature of the story wanted; and thus it is that, in "the true history" formed upon the play which Mr. Collier has analysed, the unity of idea is kept in the expression of the title-page, "as it was lately presented by the worthy and ancient poet, John Gower." Nevertheless, such a story we believe could not have been chosen by Shakspeare in the seventeenth century, when his art was fully developed in all its wondrous powers and combinations. With his perfect mastery of the faculty of representing, instead of recording, the treatment of a story which would have required perpetual explanation and connection would have been painful to him, if not impossible.

Dr. Drake has bestowed very considerable attention upon the endeavour to prove that 'Pericles' ought to be received as the indisputable work of Shakspeare. Yet his arguments, after all, amount only to the establishment of the following theory:—"No play, in fact, more openly discloses the hand of Shakspeare than 'Pericles,' and fortunately his share in its composition appears to have been very considerable: he may be distinctly, though not frequently, traced in the first and second acts; after which, *feeling the incompetency of his fellow-labourer*, he seems to have assumed almost the entire management of the remainder, nearly the whole of the third, fourth, and fifth acts bearing in-

disputable testimony to the genius and execution of the great master."* This theory of companionship in the production of the play is merely a repetition of the theory of Steevens: "The *purpurei panni* are Shakspeare's, and the rest the productions of some inglorious and forgotten play-wright." We have no faith whatever in this very easy mode of disposing of the authorship of a doubtful play—of leaving entirely out of view the most important part of every drama, its action, its characterization, looking at the whole merely as a collection of passages, of which the worst are to be assigned to some *âme damnée*, and the best triumphantly claimed for Shakspeare. There are some, however, who judge of such matters upon broader principles. Mr. Hallam says, "Pericles is generally reckoned to be in part, and only in part, the work of Shakspeare. From the poverty and bad management of the fable, the want of any effective or distinguishable character (for Marina is no more than the common form of female virtue, such as all the dramatists of that age could draw), and a general feebleness of the tragedy as a whole, I should not believe the structure to have been Shakspeare's. But many passages are far more in his manner than in that of any contemporary writer with whom I am acquainted."† Here "the poverty and bad management of the fable"—"the want of any effective or distinguishable character," are assigned for the belief that the structure could not have been Shakspeare's. But let us accept Dryden's opinion, that

"Shakspeare's own muse his Pericles first bore," with reference to the original structure of the play, and the difficulty vanishes. It was impossible that the character of the early drama should not have been impressed upon Shakspeare's earliest efforts. Sidney has given us a most distinct description of that drama; and we can thus understand how the author of 'Pericles' improved upon what he found. Do we therefore think that the drama, as it has come down to us, is

* 'Shakspeare and his Times,' vol. ii. p. 268.

† 'History of Literature,' vol. iii. p. 569.

presented in the form in which it was first written? By no means. We agree with Mr. Hallam that in parts the language seems rather that of Shakspeare's "second or third manner than of his first." But this belief is not inconsistent with the opinion that the original structure was Shakspeare's. No other poet that existed at the beginning of the seventeenth century—perhaps no poet that came after that period, whether Massinger, or Fletcher, or Webster—could have written the greater part of the fifth act. Coarse as the comic scenes are, there are touches in them unlike any other writer but Shakspeare. Horn, with the eye of a real critic, has pointed out the deep poetical profundity of one apparently slight passage in these unpleasant scenes:—

"Mar. Are you a woman?

Bawd. What would you have me be, an I be not a woman?

Mar. An honest woman, or not a woman."

Touches such as these are not put into the work of other men. Who but Shakspeare could have written

"The blind mole casts
Copp'd hills towards heaven, to tell, the earth
is throng'd

By man's oppression; and the poor worm
doth die for 't."

And yet this passage comes naturally enough in a speech of no very high excellence. The *purpurei panni* must be fitted to a body, as well for use as for adornment. We think that Shakspeare would not have taken the trouble to produce these costly robes for the decoration of what another had essentially created. We are willing to believe that, even in the very height of his fame, he would have bestowed any amount of labour for the improvement of an early production of his own, if the taste of his audiences had from time to time demanded its continuance upon the stage. It is for this reason that we think that 'Pericles,' which appears to have been in some respects a new play at the beginning of the seventeenth century, was the revival of a play written by Shakspeare some twenty years earlier.

CHAPTER III.

THE HAMLET OF 1603.

THE earliest edition of 'Hamlet' known to exist is that of 1603. It bears the following title: 'The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke, by William Shakespeare. As it hath beene diverse times acted by his Highnesse servants in the Cittie of London: as also in the two Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, and elsewhere. At London, printed for N. L. and John Trundell, 1603.' The only known copy of this edition is in the library of the Duke of Devonshire; and that copy is not quite perfect. It was reprinted in 1825.

The second edition of 'Hamlet' was printed in 1604, under the following title: 'The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke. By William Shakespeare. Newly imprinted and *enlarged to almost as much againe as it was*, according to the true and perfect coppie.'

In the reprint of the edition of 1603, it is stated to be "the only known copy of this tragedy, *as originally written by Shakespeare*, which he afterwards altered and enlarged." We believe that this description is correct; that this remarkable copy gives us the play as originally written by Shakspeare. It may have been piratical, and we think it was so. It may, as Mr. Collier says, have been "published in haste from a short-hand copy, taken from the mouths of the players." But this process was not applied to the finished 'Hamlet'; the 'Hamlet' of 1603 is a sketch of the perfect 'Hamlet,' and probably a corrupt copy of that sketch. Mr. Caldecott believes that this copy exhibits, "in that which was afterwards wrought into a splendid drama, the first conception, and comparatively feeble expression, of a great mind." We think, further, that this first conception was an early conception; that it was remodelled,—"*enlarged to almost as much againe as it was*," at the beginning of the 17th century; and that this original copy, being then of comparatively little value, was piratically published.

The interest of this edition of 1603 consists, as we believe, in the opportunity which it affords of studying the growth, not only of our great poet's command over language—not only of his dramatical skill,—but of the higher qualities of his intellect—his profound philosophy, his wonderful penetration into what is most hidden and obscure in men's characters and motives. We request the reader's indulgence whilst we attempt to point out some of the more important considerations which have suggested themselves to us, in a careful study of this original edition.

And, first, let us state that all the *action* of the amended 'Hamlet' is to be found in the first sketch. The play opens with the scene in which the Ghost appears to Horatio and Marcellus. The order of the dialogue is the same; but, in the quarto of 1604, it is a little elaborated. The grand passage beginning—

"In the most high and palmy state of Rome," is not found in this copy; and it is omitted in the folio. The second scene introduces us, as at present, to the King, Queen, Hamlet, Polonius, and Laertes, but in this copy Polonius is called Corambis. The dialogue here is much extended in the perfect copy. We will give an example:—

QUARTO OF 1603.

"*Ham.* My lord, 't is not the sable suit I wear;
No, nor the tears that still stand in my eyes,
Nor the distracted 'haviour in the visage,
Nor altogether mixt with outward semblance,
Is equal to the sorrow of my heart;
Him have I lost I must of force forgo,
These, but the ornaments and suits of woe."

QUARTO OF 1604.

"*Ham.* 'T is not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forced breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected 'haviour of the visage,

Together with all forms, modes, shows of grief,

That can denote me truly: these, indeed, seem,
For they are actions that a man might play;
But I have that within which passeth show;
These, but the trappings and the suits of woe."

We would ask if it is possible that such a careful working up of the first idea could have been any other work than that of the poet himself? Can the alterations be accounted for upon the principle that the first edition was an imperfect copy of the complete play, "published in haste from a short-hand copy taken from the mouths of the players?" Could the players have transformed the line—

"But I have that within which passeth show,"
into,

"Him have I lost I must of force forgo."

The haste of short-hand does not account for what is truly the refinement of the poetical art. The same nice elaboration is to be found in Hamlet's soliloquy in the same scene. In the first copy we have not the passage so characteristic of Hamlet's mind,

"How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world."

Neither have we the noble comparison of "Hyperion to a satyr." The fine Shakspearean phrase, so deep in its metaphysical truth, "*a beast that wants discourse of reason*," is, in the first copy, "*a beast devoid of reason*." Shakspeare must have dropt verse from his mouth, as the fairy in the Arabian tales dropt pearls. It appears to have been no effort to him to have changed the whole arrangement of a poetical sentence, and to have inverted its different members; he did this as readily as if he were dealing with prose. In the first copy we have these lines,—

"Why, she would hang on him as if increase
Of appetite had grown by what it look'd on."

In the amended copy we have—

"Must I remember? Why, she would hang on
him
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on."

Such changes are not the work of short-hand writers.

The interview of Horatio, Bernardo, and Marcellus, with Hamlet, succeeds as in the perfect copy, and the change here is very slight. The scene between Laertes and Ophelia in the same manner follows. Here again there is a great extension. The injunction of Laertes in the first copy is contained in these few lines:—

"I see Prince Hamlet makes a show of love.
Beware, Ophelia; do not trust his vows.
Perhaps he loves you now, and now his tongue
Speaks from his heart; but yet take heed, my
sister.
The chariest maid is prodigal enough
If she unmask her beauty to the moon;
Virtue itself 'scapes not calumnious thoughts:
Believe 't, Ophelia; therefore keep aloof,
Lest that he trip thy honour and thy fame."

Compare this with the splendid passage which we now have. Look especially at the following lines, in which we see the deep philosophic spirit of the mature Shakspeare:—

"For nature, crescent, does not grow alone
In thews, and bulk; but, as this temple waxes,
The inward service of the mind and soul
Grows wide withal."

Polonius and his few precepts next occur; and here again there is slight difference. The lecture of the old courtier to his daughter is somewhat extended. In the next scene, where Hamlet encounters the Ghost, there is very little change. The character of Hamlet is fully conceived in the original play, whenever he is in action, as in this scene. It is the contemplative part of his nature which is elaborated in the perfect copy. This great scene, as it was first written, appeared to the poet to have been scarcely capable of improvement.

The character of Polonius, under the name of Corambis, presents itself in the original copy with little variation. We have extension, but not change. As we proceed, we find that Shakspeare in the first copy more emphatically marked the supposed madness of Hamlet than he thought fit to

do in the amended copy. Thus Ophelia does not, as now, say,—

“Alas my lord, my lord, I have been so affrighted;”

but she comes at once to proclaim Hamlet *mad* :—

“O my dear father, such a change in nature,
So great an alteration in a prince!

He is bereft of all the wealth he had;

The jewel that adorn'd his feature most

Is filch'd and stolen away—his wit's bereft him.”

Again, in the next scene, when the King communicates his wishes to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he does not speak of Hamlet as merely put “from the understanding of himself;” but in this first copy he says—

“Our dear cousin Hamlet

Hath lost the very heart of all his sense.”

In the description which Polonius, in the same scene, gives of Hamlet's madness for Ophelia's love, the symptoms are made much stronger in the original copy :—

“He straightway grew into a melancholy;

From that unto a fast; then unto distraction;

Then into a sadness; from that unto a madness;

And so, by continuance and weakness of the brain,

Into this frenzy which now possesses him.”

It is curious that, in Burton's ‘Anatomy of Melancholy,’ we have the stages of melancholy, madness, and frenzy, indicated as described by Celsus; and Burton himself mentions frenzy as the worst stage of madness, “clamorous, continual.” In the first copy, therefore, Hamlet, according to the description of Polonius, is not only the prey of melancholy and madness, but, “by continuance,” of frenzy. In the amended copy the symptoms, according to the same description, are much milder;—a sadness—a fast—a watch—a weakness—a lightness—and a madness. The reason of this change appears to us tolerably clear. Shakspeare did not, either in his first sketch or his amended copy, intend his audience to believe that Hamlet was essentially mad; and he removed, therefore, the strong expressions which might encourage that belief.

Immediately after the scene of the original copy in which Polonius describes Hamlet's frenzy, Hamlet comes in and speaks the celebrated soliloquy. In the amended copy this passage, as well as the scene with Ophelia which follows it, is placed after Hamlet's interview with the players. The soliloquy in the first copy is evidently given with great corruptions, and some of the lines appear transposed by the printer: on the contrary, the scene with Ophelia is very slightly altered. The scene with Polonius, now the second scene of the second act, follows that with Ophelia in the first copy. In the interview with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz the dialogue is greatly elaborated in the amended copy; we have the mere germ of the fine passage, “This goodly frame, the earth,” &c.—prose with almost more than the music of poetry. In the first copy, instead of this noble piece of rhetoric, we have the following somewhat tame passage :—

“Yes, faith, this great world you see contents me not; no, nor the spangled heavens, nor earth, nor sea; no, nor man that is so glorious a creature contents not me; no, nor woman too, though you laugh.”

We pass over for the present the dialogue between Hamlet and the players, in which there are considerable variations, not only between the first and second quartos, but between the second quarto and the folio, tending, as we think, to fix the date of each copy. In the same way we pass over the speeches from the play “that pleased not the million,” as well as the directions to the players in the next act. These passages, as it appears to us, go far to establish the point, that the ‘Hamlet’ of the edition of 1603 was an early production of the poet. Our readers, we think, will be pleased to compare the following passage of the first copy and the amended play, which offer us an example of the most surpassing skill in the elaboration of a first idea —

QUARTO OF 1603.

“*Ham.* Horatio, thou art even as just a man
As e'er my conversation coped withal.

Hor. O, my lord!

Ham. Nay, why should I flatter thee?
 Why should the poor be flatter'd?
 What gain should I receive by flattering thee,
 That nothing hath but thy good mind?
 Let flattery sit on those time-pleasing tongues,
 To glose with them that love to hear their praise,
 And not with such as thou, Horatio."

QUARTO OF 1604.

"*Ham.* Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
 As e'er my conversation coped withal.

Hor. O, my dear lord,—

Ham. Nay, do not think I flatter:
 For what advancement may I hope from thee,
 That no revenue hast, but thy good spirits,
 To feed, and clothe thee? Why should the poor
 be flatter'd?

No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp;
 And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee,
 Where thrift may follow fawning. Dost thou
 hear?

Since my dear soul was mistress of my choice,
 And could of men distinguish, her election
 Hath seal'd thee for herself: for thou hast been
 As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing;
 A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
 Has ta'en with equal thanks: and bless'd are
 those,

Whose blood and judgment are so well co-
 mingled,

That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
 To sound what stop she please: Give me that
 man

That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
 In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart,
 As I do thee.—Something too much of this."

Schlegel observes, that "Shakspeare has
 composed 'the play' in 'Hamlet' altogether
 in sententious rhymes, full of antitheses."
 Let us give an example of this in the open-
 ing speech of the king:—

"Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone
 round,

Neptune's salt wash, and Tellus' orbed ground;
 And thirty dozen moons with borrow'd sheen,
 About the world have times twelve thirties
 been,

Since love our hearts and Hymen did our
 hands

Unite, commutual in most sacred bands."

Here is not only the antithesis, but the artifi-
 cial elevation, that was to keep the language
 of the interlude apart from that of the

real drama. Shakspeare has most skilfully
 managed the whole business of the player-
 king and queen upon this principle; but, as
 we think, when he wrote his first copy, his
 power as an artist was not so consummate.
 In that copy, the first lines of the player-
 king are singularly flowing and musical; and
 their sacrifice shows us how inexorable was
 his judgment:—

"Full forty years are pass'd, their date is gone,
 Since happy time join'd both our hearts as one;
 And now the blood that fill'd my youthful
 veins

Runs weakly in their pipes, and all the strains
 Of music, which whilome pleased mine ear,
 Is now a burthen that age cannot bear."

The soliloquy of the king in the third act
 is greatly elaborated from the first copy;
 and so is the scene between Hamlet and his
 mother. In the play, as we now have it,
 Shakspeare has left it doubtful whether the
 queen was privy to the murder of her hus-
 band; but in this scene, in the first copy,
 she says,—

"But, as I have a soul, I swear by heaven,
 I never knew of this most horrid murder."

And Hamlet, upon this declaration, says,—

"And, mother, but assist me in revenge,
 And in his death your infamy shall die."

The queen, upon this, protests—

"I will conceal, consent, and do my best,
 What stratagem soe'er thou shalt devise."

In the amended copy, the queen merely
 says,—

"Be thou assured if words be made of breath,
 And breath of life, I have no life to breathe
 What thou hast said to me."

The action of the amended copy, for the
 present, proceeds as in the first copy. Ger-
 trude describes the death of Polonius, and
 Hamlet pours forth his bitter sarcasm upon
 the king:—"Your fat king and your lean
 beggar are but variable services." Hamlet
 is despatched to England. Fortinbras and
 his forces appear upon the stage. The fine
 scene between Hamlet and the captain, and
 Hamlet's subsequent soliloquy, are not to be
 found in the quarto of 1603. The madness

of Ophelia is beautifully elaborated in the amended copy, but all her snatches of songs are the same in both editions. What she sings, however, in the first scene of the original copy, is with great art transposed to the second scene of the amended one. The pathos of—

“And will he not come again?”

is doubled, as it now stands, by the presence of Laertes.

We are now arrived at a scene in the quarto of 1603, altogether different from anything we find in the amended copy. It is a short scene between Horatio and the queen, in which Horatio relates Hamlet's return to Denmark, and describes the treason which the king had plotted against him, as well as the mode by which he had evaded it, by the sacrifice of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The queen, with reference to the

“——subtle treason that the king had plotted,” says—

“Then I perceive there's treason in his looks
That seem'd to sugar o'er his villainy;
But I will soothe and please him for a time,
For murderous minds are always jealous.”

This is decisive as to Shakspeare's original intentions with regard to the queen; but the suppression of the scene in the amended copy is another instance of his admirable judgment. She does not redeem her guilt by entering into plots against her guilty husband; and it is far more characteristic of the irregular impulses of Hamlet's mind, and of his subjection to circumstances, that he should have no confidences with his mother, and should not form with her and Horatio any plans of revenge. The story of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is told in six lines:—

Queen. “But what became of Gilderstone and Rossencraft?”

Hor. He being set ashore, they went for England,

And in the packet there writ down that doom
To be perform'd on them pointed for him:
And by great chance he had his father's seal,
So all was done without discovery.”

The expansion of this simple passage into

the exquisite narrative of Hamlet to Horatio of the same circumstances, presents, to our minds, a most remarkable example of the difference between the mature and the youthful intellect.

The scene of the grave-digger, in the original copy, has all the great points of the present scene. The frenzy of Hamlet at the grave is also the same. Who but the poet himself could have worked up this line—

“Anon, as mild and gentle as a dove,”

into—

“Anon, as patient as the female dove,
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His silence will sit drooping.”

The scene with Osric is greatly expanded in the amended copy. The catastrophe appears to be the same; but the last leaf of the copy of 1603 is wanting.

There is a general belief that some play under the title of “Hamlet” had preceded the “Hamlet” of Shakspeare. Probable as this may be, it appears to us that this belief is sometimes asserted too authoritatively. Mr. Collier, whose opinion upon such matters is indeed of great value, constantly speaks of “The old ‘Hamlet,’” in his ‘Annals of the Stage.’ Mr. Skottowe is more unqualified in his assertion of this fact:—“The history of ‘Hamlet’ formed the subject of a play which was acted previous to 1589; and, arguing from the general course of Shakspeare's mind, that play influenced him during the composition of his own ‘Hamlet.’ But, unfortunately, the old play is lost.” In a very useful and accurate work, ‘Lowndes's Bibliographer's Manual,’ we are told in express terms of “*Kyd's* old play of ‘Hamlet.’” Mr. Skottowe and Mr. Lowndes have certainly mistaken conjecture for proof. Not a tittle of distinct evidence exists to show that there was any other play of ‘Hamlet’ but that of Shakspeare; and all the collateral evidence upon which it is inferred that an earlier play of ‘Hamlet’ than Shakspeare's did exist, may, on the other hand, be taken to prove that Shakspeare's original sketch of ‘Hamlet’ was in repute at an earlier period than is

commonly assigned as its date. This evidence is briefly as follows :—

1. Dr. Farmer, in his 'Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare,' first brought forward a passage in 'An Epistle to the Gentlemen Students of the Two Universities,' by Thomas Nash, prefixed to Green's 'Arcadia,' which he considers directed "very plainly at Shakspeare in particular." It is as follows:—"It is a common practise now-a-days, among a sort of shifting companions, that runne through every art, and thrive by none, to leave the trade of *Noverint*, whereto they were born, and busie themselves with the endeavors of art, that could scarcely latinize their neck-verse if they should have neede; yet English Seneca, reade by candle-light, yields many good sentences, as *Bloud is a beggar*, and so forth: and, if you intreat him farre in a frosty morning, he will affoord you whole *Hamlets*, I should say, handfuls, of tragical speeches." Farmer adds, "I cannot determine exactly when this epistle was first published, but I fancy it would carry the original 'Hamlet' somewhat further back than we have hitherto done." Malone found that this epistle was published in 1589; Mr. Dyce says 1587; but no proof of this earlier date is given (Greene's Works); and he, therefore, was inclined to think that the allusion was not to Shakspeare's drama, conjecturing that the 'Hamlet' just mentioned might have been written by Kyd. Mr. Brown, in his ingenious work on Shakspeare's Sonnets, contends that the passage applies distinctly to Shakspeare;—that the expression, "the trade of *Noverint*," had reference to some one who had been a lawyer's clerk;—and that the technical use of law phrases by Shakspeare proves that his early life had been so employed. We have then only the difficulty of believing that the original sketch of 'Hamlet' was written in, or before, the year 1589. Mr. Brown leaps over the difficulty, and assigns this sketch, as published in the quarto of 1603, to the year 1589. We see nothing extravagant in this belief. Let it be remembered that in that very year, when Shakspeare was twenty-five, it has been distinctly proved by Mr. Collier that he was a sharer in the Blackfriars The-

atre, with others, and some of note, below him in the list of sharers.

2. In the accounts found at Dulwich College, which were kept by Henslowe, an actor contemporary with Shakspeare, we find the following entry as connected with the theatre at Newington Butts :—

"9 of June 1594, Rd. at hamlet . . . VIII s."

The eight shillings constituted Henslowe's share of the profits of this representation. Malone says, that this is a full confirmation that there was a play on the subject of Hamlet prior to Shakspeare's; for "it cannot be supposed that our poet's play should have been performed but once in the time of this account, and that Mr. Henslowe should have drawn from such a piece but the sum of eight shillings, when his share in several other plays came to three and sometimes four pounds." We cannot go along with this reasoning. Henslowe's accounts are thus headed :—"In the name of God, Amen, beginning at Newington, my lord admirall men, and my lord chamberlen men, as followeth, 1594." Now, "my lord chamberlen" men were the company to which Shakspeare belonged; and one of their theatres, the Globe, was erected in the spring of 1594. The theatre was wholly of wood, according to Hentzner's description of it; it would, therefore, be quickly erected; and it is extremely probable that Shakspeare's company only used the theatre at Newington Butts for a very short period, during the completion of their own theatre, which was devoted to summer performances. We can find nothing in Malone's argument to prove that it was not Shakspeare's 'Hamlet' which was acted by Shakspeare's company on the 9th of June, 1594. On the previous 16th of May, Henslowe's accounts are headed, "by my lord admirall's men;" and it is only on the 3rd of June that we find the "lord chamberlen men," as well as the "lord admirall men," performing at this theatre. Their occupation of it might have been very temporary; and, during that occupation, Shakspeare's 'Hamlet' might have been once performed. The very next entry, the 11th of June, is, "at the taming of a shrewe;" and Malone,

in a note, adds, "the play which preceded Shakspeare's." When Malone wrote this note, he believed that Shakspeare's 'Taming of the Shrew' was a late production; but, in the second edition of his 'Chronological Order,' he is persuaded that it was one of his *very early* productions. There is nothing to prove that *both* these plays thus acted were not Shakspeare's.

3. In a tract entitled 'Wit's Miserie, or the World's Madnesse,' by Thomas Lodge, printed in 1596, one of the devils is said to be "a foul lubber, and looks as pale as the vizard of the ghost, who cried so miserably at the theatre, *Hamlet, revenge*." In the first edition of Malone's 'Chronological Order,' he says, "If the allusion was to our author's tragedy, this passage will ascertain its appearance in or before 1596; but Lodge *may* have had the elder play in his contemplation." In the second edition of this essay, Malone changes his opinion, and says, "Lodge *must* have had the elder play in his contemplation."

4. Steevens, in his Preliminary Remarks to 'Hamlet,' has this passage:—"I have seen a copy of Speght's edition of 'Chaucer,' which formerly belonged to Dr. Gabriel Harvey (the antagonist of Nash), who, in his own hand-writing, has set down 'Hamlet' as a performance with which he was well acquainted, in the year 1598." Malone considered this decisive in the first edition of his 'Chronological Order,' but in the second edition, having seen the book, he persuaded himself that the date 1598 referred to the time when Harvey purchased it; and he therefore rejects the evidence. He then peremptorily fixes the first appearance of 'Hamlet' in 1600, from the reference that is made in it to the "inhibition" of the players. We shall speak of this presently. In the mean time it may be sufficient to remark, that the passage is not found in the first quarto of 1603, of the existence of which Malone was uninformed; and that, therefore, this proof goes for nothing.

And now, leaving our readers to form their own judgment upon the external evidence as to the date of 'Hamlet,' we must express our decided opinion, grounded upon an attentive

comparison of the original sketch with the perfect play, that the original sketch was an early production of our poet. The copy of 1603 is no doubt piratical; it is unquestionably very imperfectly printed. But, if the passage about the "inhibition" of the players fixes the date of the perfect play at 1600, which we believe it does, the essential differences between the sketch and the perfect play—differences which do not depend upon the corruption of a text—can only be accounted for upon the belief that there was a considerable interval between the production of the first and second copy, in which the author's power and judgment had become mature, and his peculiar habits of philosophical thought had been completely established. This is a matter which does not admit of proof within our limited space; but the passages which we have already given from the original copy do something to prove it, and we have other differences of the same character to point out, which we shall do as briefly as possible.

Mr. Hallam (in his admirable work, the 'Introduction to the Literature of Europe'), speaking of 'Romeo and Juliet' as an early production of our poet, points out, as a proof of this, "the want of that thoughtful philosophy, which, when once it had germinated in Shakspeare's mind, never ceased to display itself."* 'Hamlet,' as it now stands, is full of this "thoughtful philosophy." But the original sketch, as given in the quarto of 1603, exhibits few traces of it in the form of didactic observations. The whole dramatic conduct of the action is indeed demonstrative of a philosophical conception of incidents and characters; but, in the form to which Mr. Hallam refers, the "thoughtful philosophy" is almost entirely wanting in that sketch. We must indicate a few examples very briefly, of passages illustrating this position, which are *not there found*, requesting our readers to refer to the text:—

Act I., Sc. 3. "For nature, crescent," &c.

4. "This heavy-headed revel," &c.

„ II., „ 2. "There is nothing, either good or bad, but thinking makes it so," &c.

* Vol. ii. p. 390.

Act II., Sc. 2. "I could be bounded in a nutshell," &c.

„ III., „ 4. "Bring me to the test, and I the matter will re-word," &c.

„ IV., „ 3. "I see a cherub," &c.

5. "Nature is fine in love," &c.

„ V., „ 2. "There's a divinity," &c.

Further, Mr. Hallam observes, "There seems to have been a period of Shakspeare's life when his heart was ill at ease, and ill content with the world or his own conscience: the memory of hours mis-spent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man's worser nature, which intercourse with ill-chosen associates, by choice or circumstance, peculiarly teaches,—these, as they sank down into the depths of his great mind, seem not only to have inspired into it the conception of Lear and Timon, but that of one primary character, the censurer of mankind." The *type*, Mr. Hallam proceeds to say, is first seen in Jaques,—then in the exiled duke of the same play,—and in the duke of 'Measure for Measure;' but in these in the shape of "merely contemplative philosophy." "In 'Hamlet' this is mingled with the impulses of a perturbed heart, under the pressure of extraordinary circumstances." These plays, Mr. Hallam points out, all belong to the same period—the beginning of the seventeenth century: he is speaking of the 'Hamlet,' "*in its altered form.*" Without admitting the absolute correctness of this reasoning, we may ground an opinion upon it. If this *type* be not found in the 'Hamlet' of the original sketch, we may refer that sketch to an earlier period. It is remarkable that in this sketch the misanthropy, if so it may be called, of 'Hamlet,' can scarcely be traced; his feelings have altogether reference to his personal griefs and doubts. Mr. Hallam says that, in the plays subsequent to these mentioned above, "much of moral speculation will be found; but he has never returned to this type of character in the personages."* We shall give a few examples, as in the case of the "thoughtful philosophy," of the *absence* in the first sketch of the passages which indi-

cate the existence of the morbid feelings to which Mr. Hallam alludes:—

Act I., Sc. 2. "How weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable," &c.

„ II., „ 2. "Denmark's a prison," &c.

"I have of late (but wherefore I know not) lost all my mirth," &c.

„ III., „ 1. The soliloquy. All that appears in the perfect copy as the outpouring of a wounded spirit, such as "the pangs of dispriz'd love,"—"the insolence of office,"—"the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes,"—are *generalized* in the quarto of 1603, as follows:—

"Who'd bear the scorns and flattery of the world,—

Scorn'd by the rich, the rich cursed of the poor,
The widow being oppress'd, the orphan wrong'd,
The taste of hunger, or a tyrant's reign,
And thousand more calamities beside?"

Act V., Sc. 2. "Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath of pain."

We could multiply examples. But there are differences between the first and second copies which address themselves more distinctly to the understanding, in corroboration of our opinion that there was a considerable interval between the production of the sketch and the perfect play.

We will first take the passage relating to the "tragedians of the city," placing the text of the first and second quartos in juxtaposition:—

QUARTO OF 1603.

"*Ham.* Players, what players be they?

Ros. My lord, the tragedians of the city, those that you took delight to see so often.

Ham. How comes it that they travel? Do they grow restie?

Gil. No, my lord, their reputation holds as it was wont.

Ham. How then?

Gil. Yfaith, my lord, novelty carries it away;

* Vol. iii. pp. 568 and 569.

for the principal public audience that came to them are turned to private plays, and to the humour of children."

QUARTO OF 1604.

Ham. What players are they?

Ros. Even those you were wont to take such delight in, the tragedians of the city.

Ham. How chances it they travel? their residence, both in reputation and profit, was better both ways.

Ros. I think their inhibition comes by the means of the late innovation.

Ham. Do they hold the same estimation they did when I was in the city? are they so followed?

Ros. No, indeed are they not."

We thus see that in the original play the "tragedians of the city," by which are unquestionably meant certain players of Shakspeare's own day, were not adequately rewarded, because the public audience "turned to private plays, and to the humour of children." On the contrary, in the augmented play, *published* in the following year, they were not so followed—they were inhibited in consequence of a late innovation. The words "inhibition" and "innovation" point to some public proceeding; "novelty," on the other hand, "private plays," and "the humour of children," would seem to have reference to some popular caprice. "The humour of children," in the first copy, points to a period when plays were acted by children; when the novelty of such performances, diminishing the attractions of the tragedians of the city, compelled them to travel. The children of Paul's represented plays in their singing school at a very early period. Several of Lyly's pieces were presented by them subsequent to 1584, according to Mr. Collier; but in 1591 we find these performances suppressed. In the address of the printer before Lyly's 'Endymion,' published in 1591, the suppression is mentioned as a recent event:—"Since the plays in Paul's were dissolved, there are certain comedies come to my hand." In 1596 the interdict was not taken off; for Nash, in his 'Have with You to Saffron Waldon,' printed in that year, wishes to see the "plays at Paul's up again." But in 1600

we find a private play, attributed to Lyly, "acted by the children of Powles." In 'Jack Drum's Entertainment,' 1601, we find the performances of these children described, with the observation,—"The apes in time will do it handsomely." The audience is mentioned as a "good gentle audience." Our belief, founded upon this passage, is, that the first copy of 1603 refers to the period before 1591, when "the humour of children" prevailed; and that the "innovation," mentioned in the second copy, refers to the removal of the interdict, which removal occasioned the revival of plays at Paul's, about 1600. In that year came the "inhibition." On the 22nd of June, 1600, an order of the Privy Council appeared, "for the restraint of the immoderate use of play-houses;" and it is here prescribed "that there shall be about the city two houses and no more allowed, to serve for the use of the common stage plays." No restraint was, however, laid upon the children of Paul's. It appears to us, therefore, that the inhibition and innovation are distinctly connected in Shakspeare's mind. The passage is to us decisive, as fixing the date of the augmented play about 1600; as it is equally clear to us that the passage of the first copy has reference to an earlier period. The text, as we now have it,—*"There is, Sir, an ayrie of children,"* who "so berattle the common stages,"—belongs to a later period, when the children of Paul's acted the plays of Marston, Dekker, and other writers of repute, and the Blackfriars' Theatre was in the possession of a company of boys. In 1612, the performances of children had been made the vehicle for scurrility, and they were again suppressed. (See Mr. Collier's 'Annals of the Stage,' vol. i. pp. 279, 282; and Malone's 'Historical Account of the English Stage,' Boswell's edition, pp. 62 and 453.)

The speech from the play that was "never acted, or not above once,"—that "pleased not the million,"—is found, with very slight alteration, in the quarto of 1603; and so is Hamlet's commendation of it. We agree with Coleridge, that "the fancy that a burlesque was intended sinks below criticism." Warburton expressed the same opinion, in oppo-

sition to Dryden and Pope. Coleridge very justly says, that the diction of these lines was authorized by the actual style of the tragedies before Shakspeare's time. Ritson, we think, has hit the truth:—"It appears to me not only that Shakspeare had the favourable opinion of these lines which he makes Hamlet express, but that they were extracted from some play which he, at a more early period, had either produced or projected upon the story of 'Dido and Æneas.' The verses recited are far superior to those of any coeval writer; the parallel passage in Marlowe and Nash's 'Dido' will not bear the comparison. Possibly, indeed, it might have been his first attempt, before the divinity that lodged within him had instructed him to despise the tumid and unnatural style so much and so unjustly admired in his predecessors or contemporaries." The introduction of these lines, we think, cannot be accounted for upon any other supposition but that they were written by Shakspeare himself; and he is so thoroughly in earnest in his criticism upon the play, and his complaint of its want of success is so apparently sincere, that it is impossible to imagine that the passage had reference to something non-existent. But would Shakspeare, then, have produced such a play, except in his very early career, before he understood his own peculiar powers?—and would he have written so sensitively about it, except under the immediate influence of the disappointment occasioned by its failure? The dates of the first copy of 'Hamlet,' and of the play which contained the description of "Priam's slaughter," are certainly not far removed.

Lastly, we are of opinion that the directions to the players, especially as given in the first copy, point to a state of the stage anterior to the period when Shakspeare had himself reformed it. The mention of "Termagant" and "Herod" has reference to the time when these characters possessed the stage in pageants and mysteries. Again, the reproof of the extemporal clowns—the injunction that they should speak no more than is set down for them—applied to the infancy of the stage. Shakspeare had reformed the clowns before the date usually assigned

to 'Hamlet.' In a book, called 'Tarleton's Jeast's,' published in 1611, we have some specimens of the licence which this prince of clowns was wont to take. The author, however, adds—"But would I see our clowns *in these days* do the like? No, I warrant ye." In the original copy of 'Hamlet,' the reproof of the clowns is more diffuse than in the augmented copy; and the following passage distinctly shows one of the evils which Shakspeare had to contend with, and which he probably had overcome before the end of the sixteenth century:—"And then you have some again that keeps one suit of jests, as a man is known by one suit of apparel; and gentlemen quote his jests down in their tables before they come to the play, as thus: Cannot you stay till I eat my porridge? and, you owe me a quarter's wages; and, my coat wants a cullison; and, your beer is sour; and blabbering with his lips, and thus keeping in his cinkapase of jests, when, God knows, the warm clown cannot make a jest unless by chance, as the blind man catcheth a hare: Masters, tell him of it." The additions to these directions to the players, in the augmented copy, are, on the other hand, such as bespeak a consciousness of the elevation which the stage had attained in its "high and palmy state," a little before the death of Elizabeth, when its purpose, as realised by Shakspeare and Jonson especially, was "to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure."

The history of Hamlet, or Hamleth, is found in the Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus, who died about 1204. The works of Saxo Grammaticus are in Latin, and in Shakspeare's time had not been translated into any modern language. It was inferred, therefore, by Dr. Grey and Mr. Whalley that Shakspeare must have read the original. The story, however, is to be found in Belleforest's collection of novels, begun in 1564; and an English translation of this particular story was published as a quarto tract, entitled 'The Hystorie of Hamblet, Prince of Denmarke.' Capell, in his 'School of Shakspeare,' has given some extracts

from an edition of this very rare book, dated 1608; but he conjectures that it first appeared about 1570. He has also printed the heads of chapters as they are given in this 'History. Mr. Collier has since reprinted this tract from the only copy known, which is preserved amongst Capell's collection at Cambridge. Horvendile, in the novel, is the name of Hamlet's father, Fengon that of his uncle, and Geruth that of his mother. Fengon traitorously slays Horvendile, and marries his brother's wife. In the second chapter we are informed, "how Hamlet counterfeited the madman, to escape the tyranny of his uncle, and how he was tempted by a woman (through his uncle's procurement), who thereby thought to undermine the Prince, and by that means to find out whether he counterfeited madness or not." In the third chapter we learn "how Fengon, uncle to Hamlet, a second time to entrap him in his politic madness, caused one of his counsellors to be secretly hidden in the Queen's chamber, behind the arras, to hear what speeches past between Hamlet and the Queen; and how Hamlet killed him, and escaped that danger, and what followed." It is in this part of the action that Shakspeare's use of this book may be distinctly traced. Capell says,—“Amidst this resemblance of persons and circumstances, it is rather strange that none of the relater's expressions have got into the play: and yet not one of them is to be found, except the following, in Chapter III., where Hamlet kills the counsellor (who is described as of a greater reach than the rest, and is the Poet's Polonius) behind the arras: here, beating the hangings, and perceiving something to stir under them, he is made to cry out—‘a rat, a rat,’ and presently drawing his sword, thrust it into the hangings, which done, pulled the counsellor (half dead) out by the heels, made an end of killing him.” In the fourth chapter Hamlet

is sent to England by Fengon, “with secret letters to have him put to death;” and, while his companions slept, Hamlet counterfeits the letters “willing the King of England to put the two messengers to death.” Here ends the resemblance between the history and the play. The Hamlet of the history returns to Denmark, slays his uncle, burns his palace, makes an oration to the Danes, and is elected king. His subsequent adventures are rather extravagant. He goes back to England, kills the king of that country, returns to Denmark with two English wives, and, finally, falls himself through the treachery of one of these ladies.

It is scarcely necessary to point out how little these rude materials have assisted Shakspeare in the composition of the great tragedy of ‘Hamlet.’ He found, in the records of a barbarous period, a tale of adultery, and murder, and revenge. Here, too, was a rude indication of the character of Hamlet. But what he has given us is so essentially a creation from first to last, that it would be only tedious to point out the lesser resemblances between the drama and the history. That Shakspeare adopted the period of the action as related by Saxo Grammaticus, there can be no doubt. The following passage is decisive:—

“And, England, if my love thou hold'st at aught

(As my great power thereof may give thee sense;

Since yet thy cicatrice looks raw and red

After the Danish sword, and thy free awe

Pays homage to us), thou mayst not coldly set
Our sovereign process.”

We have here a distinct indication of the period before the Norman Conquest, when England was either under the sovereignty of the Northmen, as in the time of Canute, or paid tribute to the Danish power.

CHAPTER IV.

TIMON OF ATHENS.

'THE Life of Tymon of Athens' was first published in the folio collection of 1623; and immediately previous to that publication it was entered in the books of the Stationers' Company, as one of the plays "not formerly entered to other men." The text, in this first edition, has no division into acts and scenes. We have reason to believe that, with a few exceptions, it is accurately printed from the copy which was in the possession of Heminge and Condell; and we judged it important to follow that copy with very slight variations in the text of 'The Pictorial' and other editions.

The text which is ordinarily printed, that of Steevens, has undergone, in an almost unequalled extent, what the editors call "regulation." Steevens was a great master in this art of "regulation"—a process by which what was originally printed as prose is sometimes transformed into verse, with the aid of transposition, omission, and substitution; and what, on the contrary, stood in the original as verse is changed into prose, because the ingenuity of the editor has been unable to render it strictly metrical. There are various other modes of "regulation," which have been most extensively employed in 'Timon of Athens;' and the consequence is that some very important characteristics have been utterly destroyed in the modern copies—the record has been obliterated. The task, however, which Steevens undertook was in some cases too difficult a one to be carried through consistently; and he has been compelled, therefore, to leave several passages, that invited his ambition to "regulate," even as he found them. For example, in that part of the first scene where Apemantus appears, we have a dialogue, of which Steevens thus speaks:—"The very imperfect state in which the ancient copy of this play has reached us leaves a doubt whether several short speeches in the present scene were designed for verse or prose;

I have, therefore, made no attempt at 'regulation.'" Boswell upon this very sensibly asks, "Why should not the same doubt exist with regard to other scenes, in which Mr. Steevens has not acted with the same moderation?" It will be necessary that we should here call the attention of the reader to a few specimens of the difference between the ancient and the modern text.

The original presents to us in particular scenes a very considerable number of short lines, occurring in the most rapid succession. We have no parallel example in Shakspeare of the frequency of their use. The hemistich is introduced with great effect in some of the finest passages in 'Lear.' But, in 'Timon of Athens,' its perpetual recurrence in some scenes is certainly not always a beauty. The "regulation," however, has not only concealed this peculiar feature, but has necessarily altered the structure of the verses preceding or following the hemistich. We print a few such passages in consecutive order:—

ANCIENT COPIES.

ACT I. SCENE I.

Tim. What trumpet's that?

Mess. 'Tis Alcibiades, and some twenty horse,
All of companionship.

SCENE II.

Ven. Most honoured Timon,
It hath pleas'd the gods to remember my father's
age,
And call him to long peace.

ACT III. SCENE IV.

Stew. Ay, if money were as certain as your
waiting,
'T were sure enough.
Why then preferr'd you not your sums and bills,
When your false masters eat of my lord's meat?
Then they could smile, and fawn upon his debts,

And take down th' interest into their glutt'nous maws.

You do yourselves but wrong, to stir me up;
Let me pass quietly.

ACT IV. SCENE III.

Tim. Had I a steward,
So true, so just, and now so comfortable?
It almost turns my dangerous nature wild.
Let me behold thy face: Surely, this man
Was born of woman."

MODERN COPIES.

ACT I. SCENE I.

"*Tim.* What trumpet's that?

Serv. 'T is Alcibiades, and
Some twenty horse, all of companionship.

SCENE II.

Ven. Most honour'd Timon, 't hath pleas'd
the gods remember
My father's age, and call him to long peace.

ACT III. SCENE IV.

Flav. Ay,
If money were as certain as your waiting,
'T were sure enough. Why then preferr'd you
not

Your sums and bills, when your false masters eat
Of my lord's meat? Then they could smile and
fawn

Upon his debts, and take down th' interest
Into their gluttonous maws. You do yourselves
but wrong,
To stir me up; let me pass quietly.

ACT IV. SCENE III.

Tim. Had I a steward so true, so just, and now
So comfortable? It almost turns
My dangerous nature wild. Let me behold
Thy face.—Surely this man was born of woman."

No one, we believe, having the passages
thus exhibited, will consider that Steevens
has improved the poet by his "regulation."
But, even if there should be differences of taste
in this particular with reference to the pas-
sages before us, we maintain that in those
passages, and in the examples we are about
to give, the integrity of the text ought to
have been preserved, upon a principle.

The next examples which we shall take

are those in which the prose of the original
has been turned into verse:—

ANCIENT COPIES.

ACT I. SCENE II.

"*Tim.* Now, Apemantus, if thou wert not
sullen, I would be good to thee.

Apem. No. I'll nothing; for, if I should be
brib'd too, there would be none left to rail upon
thee, and then thou wouldst sin the faster.
Thou giv'st so long, Timon, I fear me thou wilt
give away thyself in paper shortly.

ACT II. SCENE II.

Tim. I will dispatch you severally.
You to Lord Lucius, to Lord Lucullus you.
I hunted with his honour to-day; you to Sem-
pronius; commend me to their loves; and I am
proud, say, that my occasions have found time
to use 'em toward a supply of money: let the
request be fifty talents.

ACT IV. SCENE III.

Alc. Noble Timon, what friendship may I do
thee?

Tim. None, but to maintain my opinion.

Alc. What is it, Timon?

Tim. Promise me friendship, but perform
none. If thou wilt not promise, the gods plague
thee, for thou art a man: if thou dost perform,
confound thee, for thou art a man."

MODERN COPIES.

ACT I. SCENE II.

"*Tim.* Now, Apemantus, if thou wert not
sullen,
I'd be good to thee.

Apem. No, I'll nothing; for,
If I should be brib'd too, there would be none
left

To rail upon thee; and thou wouldst sin the
faster.

Thou giv'st so long, Timon, I fear me, thou
Wilt give away thyself in paper shortly.

ACT II. SCENE II.

Tim. I will despatch you severally.—You to
lord Lucius,—
To lord Lucullus you; I hunted with his
Honour to day;—you, to Sempronius;

Commend me to their loves; and, I am proud,
say,
That my occasions have found time to use them
Toward a supply of money: let the request
Be fifty talents.

ACT IV. SCENE III.

Alc. Noble Timon,
What friendship may I do thee?
Tim. None, but to
Maintain my opinion.

Alc. What is it, Timon?
Tim. Promise me friendship, but perform
none: If
Thou wilt not promise, the gods plague thee, for
Thou art a man! if thou dost perform, confound
thee,
For thou 'rt a man!"

The third and last series of examples
which we shall furnish exhibits the meta-
morphosis of the verse of the original into
prose:—

ANCIENT COPIES.

ACT V. SCENE I.

"*Painter.* Good as the best.
Promising is the very air o' th' time;
It opens the eyes of expectation.
Performance is ever the duller for his act,
And, but in the plainer and simpler kind of
people,
The deed of saying is quite out of use.
To promise is most courtly and fashionable;
Performance is a kind of will and testament
Which argues a great sickness in his judgment
That makes it.

Poet. I am thinking
What I shall say I have provided for him:
It must be a personating of himself:
A satire against the softness of prosperity,
With a discovery of the infinite flatteries
That follow youth and opulency."

MODERN COPIES.

ACT V. SCENE I.

"*Painter.* Good as the best. Promising is
the very air o' the time; it opens the eyes of
expectation: performance is ever the duller for
his act; and, but in the plainer and simpler

kind of people, the deed of saying is quite out
of use. To promise is most courtly and fash-
ionable: performance is a kind of will, or testa-
ment, which argues a great sickness in his
judgment that makes it.

Poet. I am thinking what I shall say I have
provided for him: It must be a personating of
himself: a satire against the softness of pros-
perity; with a discovery of the infinite flatteries
that follow youth and opulency."

We have thus prepared the reader, who is
familiar with the ordinary text, not to rely
upon it as a transcript of the ancient copies;
and we shall now endeavour to show that,
by a careful examination of the original, we
may arrive at some conclusions with regard
to this drama which have been hitherto en-
tirely overlooked.

The disguises of the ancient text, which
have been so long accepted without hesita-
tion, have given to the 'Timon of Athens'
something of the semblance of uniformity in
the structure of the verse; although in reality
the successive scenes, even in the modern
text, present the most startling contrarieties
to the ear which is accustomed to the versi-
fication of Shakspeare. The ordinary expla-
nation of this very striking characteristic is,
that the ancient text is corrupt. This is the
belief of the English editors. Another theory,
which has been received in Germany, is, that
the 'Timon,' being one of the latest of Shak-
spere's performances, has come down to us
unfinished. The conviction to which we
have ourselves arrived neither rests upon
the probable corruption of the text, nor the
possibility that the poet has left us only
an unfinished draft of his performance; but
upon the belief that the differences of style,
as well as the more important differences
in the cast of thought, which prevail in
the successive scenes of this drama, are so
remarkable as to justify the conclusion that
it is not wholly the work of Shakspeare. We
think it will not be very difficult so to exhi-
bit these differences in detail as to warrant
us in requesting the reader's acquiescence
in the principle which we seek to establish,
namely, that the 'Timon of Athens' was a

play originally produced by an artist very inferior to Shakspeare, and which probably retained possession of the stage for some time in its first form; that it has come down to us not only re-written, but so far re-modelled that entire scenes of Shakspeare have been substituted for entire scenes of the elder play; and lastly, that this substitution has been almost wholly confined to the character of Timon, and that in the development of that character alone, with the exception of some few occasional touches here and there, we must look for the unity of the Shakspearean conception of the Greek Misanthropos—the Timon of Aristophanes and Lucian and Plutarch—"the enemy to mankind," of the popular story books—of the 'Pleasant Histories and excellent Novels,' which were greedily devoured by the contemporaries of the boyish Shakspeare*.

The contrast of style which is to be traced throughout this drama is sufficiently striking in the two opening scenes which now constitute the first act. Nothing can be more free and flowing than the dialogue between the Poet and the Painter. It has all the equable graces of Shakspeare's facility, with occasional examples of that condensation of poetical images which so distinguishes him from all other writers. For instance:—

"All those which were his fellows but of late,
(Some better than his value,) on the moment
Follow his strides, his lobbies fill with tend-
ance,
Rain sacrificial whisperings in his ear,
Make sacred even his stirrup, and through
him
Drink the free air."

The foreshadowing of the fate of Timon in the conclusion of this dialogue is part of the almost invariable system by which Shakspeare very early infuses into his audience a dim notion of the catastrophe,—most frequently indeed in the shape of some presentiment. When Timon enters, we feel certain that he is the Timon of Shakspeare's own conception. He is as graceful as he is generous; his prodigality is without the

* 'The Palace of Pleasure,' in which the story of Timon is found, was first published in 1575.

slightest particle of arrogance; he builds his munificence upon the necessity of gratifying without restraint the deep sympathies which he cherishes to all of the human family. He is the very model too of patrons, appearing to receive instead of to confer a favour in his reward of art,—a complete gentleman even in the act of purchasing a jewel of a tradesman. That the Apemantus of this scene belongs wholly to Shakspeare is not to our minds quite so certain. There is little of wit in any part of this dialogue; and the pelting volley of abuse between the Cynic, the Poet, and the Painter, might have been produced by any writer who was not afraid of exhibiting the *tu quoque* style of repartee which distinguishes the angry rhetoric of fish-wives and school-boys. Shakspeare, however, has touched upon the original canvas;—no one can doubt to whom these lines belong:—

"So, so; there!—
Aches contract and starve your supple joints!—
That there should be small love 'mongst these
sweet knaves,
And all this court'sy! The strain of man's bred
out
Into baboon and monkey."

These lines in the original are printed as prose; and they continued so to be printed by Theobald and the editors who succeeded him, probably from its not being considered that *aches* is a dis-syllable. This circumstance is a confirmation to us that the dialogue with Apemantus is not entirely Shakspeare's; for it is a most remarkable fact that, in all those passages of which there cannot be a doubt that they were *wholly* written by our poet, there is no confusion of prose for verse,—no difficulties whatever in the metrical arrangement,—no opportunity presented for the exercise of any ingenuity in "regulation." It was this fact which first led us to perceive, and subsequently to trace, the differences between particular scenes and passages. Wherever the modern text follows the ancient text with very slight changes, there we could put our finger undoubtingly upon the work of Shakspeare. Wherever the tinkering of Steevens had

been at work, we could discover that he had been attempting to repair,—not “the chinks which time had made,”—but something very different from the materials with which Shakspeare constructed. The evidence of this is at hand.

If, in the first scene, it would be very difficult to say with certainty what is not Shakspeare's, so in the second scene it appears to us equally difficult to point out what is Shakspeare's. We believe that scarcely any part of this scene was written by him; we find ourselves at once amidst a different structure of verse from the foregoing. We encounter this difference remarkably in the first speech of Timon:—

“I gave it freely ever; and there's none
Can truly say he gives, if he receives:
If our betters play at that game, we must not
dare
To imitate them; faults that are rich are fair.”

In the first scene we do not find a single rhyming couplet;—in the second scene their recurrence is more frequent than in any of Shakspeare's plays, even the earliest. This scene alone gives us sixteen examples of this form of verse; which, in combination with prose or blank verse, had been almost entirely rejected by the mature Shakspeare, except to render emphatic the close of a scene. In the instance before us, we find the couplet introduced in the most arbitrary and inartificial manner—in itself neither impressive nor harmonious. But the contrast between the second scene and the first is equally remarkable in the poverty of the thought, and the absence of poetical imagery. It will be sufficient, we think, to exhibit together the Cynic of this scene and of a subsequent scene, to show the impossibility of the character having been wholly minted from the same die:—

ACT I. SCENE II.

“Hey day, what a sweep of vanity comes this way!

They dance! they are mad women:
Like madness is the glory of this life,
As this pomp shows to a little oil and root.
We make ourselves fools to disport ourselves;
And spend our flatteries, to drink those men,

Upon whose age we void it up again,
With poisonous spite and envy.
Who lives that's not depraved, or depraves?
Who dies, that bears not one spurn to their
graves
Of their friends' gift?
I should fear, those that dance before me now,
Would one day stamp upon me: It has been
done:
Men shut their doors against a setting sun.

ACT IV. SCENE III.

“Thou hast cast away thyself, being like thyself;
A madman so long, now a fool: What, think'st
That the bleak air, thy boisterous chamberlain,
Will put thy shirt on warm? Will these moist
trees,
That have outliv'd the eagle, page thy heels,
And skip when thou point'st out? Will the
cold brook,
Candied with ice, caudle thy morning taste,
To cure thy o'er-night's surfeit? call the creatures,—
Whose naked natures live in all the spite
Of wreakful heaven; whose bare unhoused
trunks,
To the conflicting elements expos'd,
Answer mere nature,—bid them flatter thee;
O! thou shalt find——”

Let us try the Steward of the first act and the Steward of the second act by the same test. We print the speech of the first act as we find it in the original. With the exception of the two rhyming couplets, it is difficult to say whether it is prose or verse. It has been “regulated” into verse, but no change can make it metrical;—the feebleness of the thought is the same under every disguise. On the other hand, the harmony, the vigour, the poetical elevation of the second passage, like the greater part of the fourth and fifth acts, effectually prevent all substitution and transposition:—

ACT I. SCENE II.

“*Flav.* What will this come to?
He commands us to provide, and give great
gifts,
And all out of an empty coffer.—
Nor will he know his purse; or yield me this,

To show him what a beggar his heart is,
 Being of no power to make his wishes good;
 His promises fly so beyond his state,
 That what he speaks is all in debt, he owes for
 every word;
 He is so kind, that he now pays interest for't;
 His lands put to their books. Well, 'would I
 were
 Gently put out of office, before I were forc'd out!
 Happier is he that hath no friend to feed,
 Than such that do even enemies exceed.
 I bleed inwardly for my lord.

ACT II. SCENE II.

Flav. If you suspect my husbandry, or falsehood,
 Call me before the exactest auditors,
 And set me on the proof. So the gods bless me,
 When all our offices have been oppress'd
 With riotous feeders; when our vaults have wept
 With drunken spilth of wine; when every room
 Hath blaz'd with lights, and bray'd with minstrelsy;
 I have retir'd me to a wasteful cock,
 And set mine eyes at flow.

Tim. Prithee, no more.

Flav. Heavens, have I said, the bounty of
 this lord!
 How many prodigal bits have slaves, and peasants,
 This night englutted! Who is not Timon's?
 What heart, head, sword, force, means, but is
 lord Timon's?
 Great Timon; noble, worthy, royal Timon!
 Ah! when the means are gone that buy this
 praise,
 The breath is gone whereof this praise is made:
 Feast-won, fast-lost; one cloud of winter showers,
 These flies are couch'd."

The modern division of this play into acts and scenes has given us a remarkable short second act. The Senator of the first scene may be Shakspeare's. The scene between the Servants, the Fool, and the Cynic, has very little of his animation or his wit. But who is the Fool's mistress? Johnson saw the want of connexion between this dialogue and what had preceded it:—"I suspect some scene to be lost, in which the entrance of the Fool and the Page that follows him was prepared by some introductory dialogue, in which the audience was informed that

they were the fool and page of Phrynia, Timandra, or some other courtesan, upon the knowledge of which depends the greater part of the ensuing jocularities." We shall have occasion to notice this want of connexion in other scenes of the play. In that before us, if the 'Timon' were an older drama remodelled by Shakspeare, the reason for the retention of the scene, disjointed as it is, is obvious.—The audience had been accustomed to the Fool; and it was of little consequence whether his speeches had any very strict connexion with the more important scenes. The whole thing wants the spirit of Shakspeare, and it wants also the play upon words which he almost invariably employed upon such occasions. The Fool, the Page, the Cynic, and the Servants, are simply abusive.

The scene between Timon and the Steward, to the end of the act, is unquestionably from the master-hand of our poet. The character of Timon as his ruin is approaching him is beautifully developed. His reproach of his Steward, slightly unjust as it is, is in a tone perfectly in accordance with the kindness of his nature; and his rising anger is forgotten in a moment in his complete conviction of the integrity of that honest servant. His entire reliance upon the gratitude of his friends is most touching. Thoroughly Shakspearean is the Steward's description of the coldness of the Senators; and Timon's answer is no less characteristic of the great interpreter of human feelings.

We venture to express a conviction that very little of the third act is Shakspeare's. The ingratitude of Lucullus in the first scene, and of Lucius in the second, is amusingly displayed; but there is little power in the development of character—little discrimination. The passionate invective of Flaminius is forcible; but the force is not exactly that of Shakspeare. The dialogue between the Strangers, at the end of the second scene, is unmetrical enough in the original; Steevens has made it hobble still worse. The third scene has the same incurable defects. It seems to us perfectly impossible that Shakspeare could have produced thoughts so commonplace, and verse

so unmusical, as we find in the speech of Sempronius. The fourth scene, again, has little peculiarity. It might be Shakspeare's, or it might be the work of an inferior writer. Of the fifth scene we venture to say most distinctly that it is not Shakspeare's. Independently of the internal evidence of thought and style (which we shall come to presently), this scene of the banishment of Alcibiades, and the concluding scene of his return to Athens, appear to belong to a drama of which the story of this brave and profligate Athenian formed a much more important feature than in the present play. That story stands here strictly as an episode. The banishment of Alcibiades is perfectly unconnected with the misanthropy of Timon;—the return of Alcibiades takes place after Timon's death. We feel no interest in either event. Ulrici has noticed the uncertain connexion of this drama as a whole, particularly in the scene before us, "where it remains quite unknown who is the unfortunate friend for whom Alcibiades petitions so earnestly that he is banished for it." In Shakspeare's hand the banishment of Alcibiades is only used in connexion with the wonderful scene in the fourth act. In the older drama we have no doubt that it formed an integral portion of the action, and that Timon himself was only incidental to the catastrophe. Shakspeare was satisfied to take the frame-work, as he found it, of the story which he might connect with his display of the character of Timon. The scene before us, and the concluding scene of the fifth act, present, we think, nearly every characteristic by which the early contemporaries of Shakspeare are to be distinguished from him; and the negation, in the same degree, of all those qualities which render him so immeasurably superior to every other dramatic poet.

The scene between Alcibiades and the Senate consists of about a hundred and twenty lines. Of these lines twenty-six form rhyming couplets. This of itself is enough to make us look suspiciously upon the scene, when presented as the work of Shakspeare. Could the poet have proposed any object to himself, by this extraordinary

departure from his usual principle of versification, presenting even in this play an especial contrast to the mighty rush and sustained grandeur of the blank verse in the speeches of Timon in the fourth and fifth acts? Is not the perpetual and offensive recurrence of the couplet an evidence that this and other scenes of the play were of the same school as 'The History of King Lear and his Three Daughters,' upon which Shakspeare founded his own 'Lear?'

The whole of the senate scene in Timon is singularly unmetrical; but, wherever the verse becomes regular, it is certainly not the metre of Shakspeare. Mark the pause, for example, that occurs at the end of every line of the first speech of Alcibiades. "The linked sweetness long drawn out" is utterly wanting. The last scene of the fifth act has the same peculiarity. But, in addition to the structure of the verse, the character of the thought is essentially different from that of the true Shakspearean drama. Where is our poet's imagery? From the first line of this scene to the last, the speeches, though cast into the form of verse, are in reality nothing but measured prose. The action of this scene admitted either of passion or reflection; and we know how Shakspeare puts forth either power whenever the occasion demands it. The passion of Alcibiades is of the most vapid character:—

"Now the gods keep you old enough; that you
may live

Only in bone that none may look on you!"

Let us contrast for a moment the Shakspearean Coriolanus, under somewhat similar circumstances:—

"You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate,
As reek o' th' rotten fens: whose loves I prize,
As the dead carcasses of unburied men,
That do corrupt my air: I banish you."

In this scene between Alcibiades and the senate, the usually profound reflection of Shakspeare, which plunges us into the depths of our own hearts, and the most unfathomable mysteries of the world around us and beyond us, is exchanged for such slight axioms as the following:—

"For pity is the virtue of the law,
And none but tyrants use it cruelly."

"To revenge is no valour, but to bear."

"To be in anger is impiety,
But who is man that is not angry?"

The form of expression in these scenes with Alcibiades appears to us as remarkably un-Shaksperean as the character of the thought. By nothing is our poet more distinguished than by his conciseness,—the quality that makes him so often apparently obscure. Shakspere would have dismissed the following idea in three words instead of three lines:—

"By decimation, and a tithed death,
(If thy revenges hunger for that food
Which nature loathes,) take thou the destin'd
tenth."

The original stage direction of the sixth scene of the fourth act is, "Enter divers Friends at several doors;" and there is a subsequent direction at the end of the scene—"Enter the Senators with other Lords." Ulrici, looking at the modern stage direction, "Enter divers Lords," is surprised that Timon's most intimate friends (Lucius, Lucullus, Sempronius) are omitted. We doubt whether the previous scenes in which these friends are introduced are those of Shakspere; and in the same way it appears to us that our poet took the scene before us as he found it, adding perhaps Timon's vehement imprecations against his

"Most smiling, smooth, detested parasites."

The scene concludes with this line—

"One day he gives us diamonds, next day
stones."

Steevens had seen a MS. play, written or transcribed about 1600, entitled 'Timon,' which was in the possession of Mr. Strutt. Of this play he says—"There is a scene in it resembling Shakspere's banquet given by Timon to his flatterers. Instead of warm water, he sets before them stones painted like artichokes." This manuscript has passed into the possession of the Rev. A. Dyce; and the Shakspere Society have printed the play under Mr. Dyce's superintendence. We transcribe the passage (modernizing the or-

thography) in which Timon, having invited his false friends to a banquet, resents their perfidy and ingratitude. Laches is the faithful steward of this old play. The guests are Gelasimus, Eutrapelus, Demeas, Philargurus, Hermogenes, and Stilpo:—

Timon. O happy me, equal to Jove himself!
I going touch the stars. Break out, O joy,
And smother not thyself within my breast!
So many friends, so many friends I see;
Not one hath falsified his faith to me.
What if I am oppressed with poverty?
And grief doth vex me? fortune left me poor?
All this is nothing: they relieve my wants;
The one doth promise help, another gold,
A third a friendly welcome to his house,
And entertainment; each man acts his part;
All promise counsel and a faithful heart.

Gelas. Timon, thou art forgetful of thy feast.

Tim. Why do ye not fall to? I am at home:
I'll standing sup, or walking, if I please.—
Laches, bring here the artichokes with speed.—
Eutrapelus, Demeas, Hermogenes,
I'll drink this cup, a health to all your healths!

Lach. Convert it into poison, O ye gods!
Let it be ratsbane to them! [*Aside.*

Gelas. What, wilt thou have the leg or else
the wing?

Eutr. Carve ye that capon.

Dem. I will cut him up,
And make a beast of him.

Phil. Timon, this health to thee.

Tim. I'll pledge you, sir.
These artichokes do no man's palate please.

Dem. I love them well, by Jove!

Tim. Here, take them, then!

[*Stones painted like to them: and
throws them at them.*

Nay, thou shalt have them, thou, and all of ye!
Ye wicked, base, perfidious rascals,
Think ye my hate's so soon extinguished?

[*Tim. beats Herm. above all the rest.*

Dem. O my head!

Herm. O my cheeks!

Phil. Is this a feast?

Gelas. Truly, a stony one.

Stil. Stones sublunary have the same matter
with the heavenly.

Tim. If I Jove's horrid thunderbolt did hold
Within my hand, thus, would I dart it!

[*He hits Herm.*

Herm. Woe and alas, my brains are dashed
out!

Gelas. Alas, alas, 'twill never be my hap
To travel now to the Antipodes!
Oh! that I had my Pegasus but here!
I'd fly away, by Jove!

[*Exeunt all except Tim. and Lach.*]

Tim. Ye are a stony generation,
Or harder, if aught harder may be found;
Monsters of Scythia inhospital,
Nay, very devils, hateful to the gods.

Lach. Master, they are gone."

It is pretty clear that Shakspeare owed no obligation to the writer of this scene. Mr. Dyce justly says, "I entertain considerable doubts of his having been acquainted with a drama which was certainly never performed in the metropolis, and which was likely to have been read only by a few of the author's particular friends, to whom transcripts of it had been presented." We have little doubt, however, that Timon was familiar to the stage before Shakspeare took up the subject; although it is tolerably evident that the play which Mr. Dyce has given to the world was not the play which Shakspeare, as we believe, partly made his own. Shakspeare, according to our belief, did what he undertook to do, and perhaps he did more than he intended. He completely remodelled the character of Timon. He left it standing apart in its naked power and majesty, without much regard to what surrounded it. It might have been a hasty experiment to produce a new character for Burbage, the greatest of Elizabethan actors. That Timon is so all in all in the play is, to our minds, much better explained by the belief that Shakspeare engrafted it upon the feeble Timon of a feeble drama that held possession of the stage, than by the common opinion that he, having written the play entirely, had left us only a corrupt text, or left it unfinished, with parts not only out of harmony with the drama as a whole, in action, in sentiment, in versification, but altogether different from anything he had himself produced in his early, his mature, or his later years.

It is scarcely necessary for us very minutely to follow the successive passages of the fourth and fifth acts, in our endeavours to trace the hand of Shakspeare. We may,

however, briefly point out the passages which we believe *not* to be his. The second scene of the fourth act, between the Steward and his servants, has some touches undoubtedly of the master's hand; the Steward's speech, after the servants have left, again presents us the rhyming couplets, and the unmetrical blank verse. The scene between the Poet and the Painter, at the commencement of the fifth act, is so unmetrical, that it has been printed as prose by all modern editors. We have already exhibited a specimen of this hobbling approach to metre—the characteristic of several of the rude plays which preceded Shakspeare, such as 'The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth.' Mr. Collier considers that play to be wholly prose; but he adds, "by the time it was printed, blank verse had completely superseded both rhyme and prose: the publisher seems, on this account, to have chopped up much of the original prose into lines of various lengths, in order to look like some kind of measure, and *now and then he has contrived to find lines of ten syllables each, that run with tolerable smoothness, and as if they had been written for blank verse.*" We venture to think, that, although the greater part of 'The Famous Victories' was intended for prose, "the lines of ten syllables each that run with tolerable smoothness" *were* written for blank verse; and this, we believe, is the case with parts of the scene in 'Timon' which we are now describing. But, whether they speak in prose or verse, the Poet and the Painter of this scene are as unlike the Poet and the Painter of the first act, in the tone of their dialogues, as can be well imagined. Timon, in the lines which he speaks aside, has caught this infection of unmetrical blank verse which reads like prose, and jingling couplets which want the spirit of poetry. The soldier at Timon's tomb is marked by the same characteristics. Of the concluding scene of the return of Alcibiades to Athens, we have already spoken.

It is not by looking apart at the scenes and passages which we have endeavoured to separate from the undoubted scenes and passages of Shakspeare in this play, that we can rightly judge of their inferiority. They must

be contrasted with the great scenes of the fourth act, and with Timon's portion of the fifth,—the essentially tragic portions of this extraordinary drama. In power those scenes are almost unequalled. They are not pleasing—they are sometimes positively repulsive in the images which they present to us: but in the tremendous strength of passionate invective we know not what can be compared to them. In 'Lear,' the deep pity for the father is an ever-present feeling, mingling with the terror which he produces by his denunciations of his daughters; but, in 'Timon,' the poet has not once sought to move our pity: by throwing him into an attitude of indiscriminating hostility to the human race, he scarcely claims any human sympathy. Properly to understand the scenes of the fourth and fifth acts, we must endeavour to form a general estimate of the character which Shakspeare has here created.

The Timon of Shakspeare is not the Timon of the popular stories of Shakspeare's day. The twenty-eighth novel of 'The Palace of Pleasure' has for its title, 'Of the strange and *beastly* nature of Timon of Athens, enemy to mankind.' According to this authority, "he was a man but by shape only,"—he lived "a *beastly* and churlish life." The story further tells us, "at the same time there was in Athens another of like quality called Apemantus, of the very same nature, different from the natural kind of man." Neither was the Timon of Plutarch the Timon of Shakspeare. The Greek biographer, indeed, tells us, that he was angry with all men, and would trust no man, "for the unthankfulness of those he had done good unto, and whom he took to be his friends," but that he was represented as "a viper and malicious man unto mankind, to shun all other men's companies but the company of young Alcibiades, a bold and insolent youth, whom he would greatly feast, and make much of, and kissed him very gladly." Plutarch also adds, "This Timon sometimes would have Apemantus in his company, because he was much liked to his nature and conditions, and also followed him in manner of life." The Timon, therefore, of Plutarch, and of the popular stories of Shakspeare's time, was little different from

the ordinary cynic, such as he is described by Lucian:—"But now, mind how you are to behave: you must be bold, saucy, and abusive to everybody, kings and beggars alike; this is the way to make them look upon you, and think you a great man. Your voice should be barbarous, and your speech dissonant, as like a dog as possible; your countenance rigid and inflexible, and your gait and demeanour suitable to it: everything you say savage and uncouth: modesty, equity, and moderation you must have nothing to do with: never suffer a blush to come upon your cheek: seek the most public and frequented place; but, when you are there, desire to be alone, and permit neither friend nor stranger to associate with you; for these things are the ruin and destruction of power and empire."* The contrast in Shakspeare between Timon and Apemantus, as developed in the fourth act, is one of the most remarkable proofs of our poet's wonderful sagacity in depicting the nicer shades of character. Johnson, speaking of the scene between the misanthrope and the cynic in the fourth act, says, "I have heard Mr. Burke commend the subtlety of discrimination with which Shakspeare distinguishes the present character of Timon from that of Apemantus, whom to vulgar eyes he would now resemble." The 'Timon' of Shakspeare is in many respects essentially different from any model with which we are acquainted, but it approaches nearer, as Mr. Skottowe first observed, to the 'Timon' of Lucian than the commentators have chosen to point out: "It has been deemed a satisfactory conclusion that he derived none of his materials from Lucian, because no translation of the dialogue of 'Timon' is known to have existed in Shakspeare's age. But it should rather have been inferred, from the many striking coincidences between the play and the dialogue, that Lucian had some influence over the composition of 'Timon,' although the channel through which that influence was communicated is no longer to be traced."† Before we proceed to an analysis of the

* Lucian's 'Sale of Philosophers.'—Franklin's Translation.

† 'Life of Shakspeare,' vol. ii. p. 280.

Shaksperean 'Timon,' it may be well to take a rapid glance at the dialogue of Lucian, to which Mr. Skottowe refers.

'Timon, or the Misanthrope,' opens with an address of Timon to Jupiter,—the protector of friendship and of hospitality. The misanthrope asks what has become of the god's thunderbolt, that he no longer revenges the wickedness of men? He then describes his own calamities. After having enriched a crowd of Athenians that he had rescued from misery,—after having profusely distributed his riches amongst his friends, those ungrateful men despise him because he has become poor. Timon speaks from the desert, where he is clothed with skins, and labours with a spade. Jupiter inquires of Mercury who it is cries so loud from the depth of the valley near Mount Hymettus; and Mercury answers that he is Timon—that rich man who so frequently offered whole hecatombs to the gods; and adds, that it was at first thought that he was the victim of his goodness, his philanthropy, and his compassion for the unfortunate, but that he ought to attribute his fall to the bad choice which he made of his friends, and to the want of discernment which prevented him seeing that he was heaping benefits upon wolves and ravens: "Whilst these vultures were preying upon his liver, he thought them his best friends, and that they fed upon him out of pure love and affection. After they had gnawed him all round, eaten his bones bare, and if there was any marrow in them sucked it carefully out, they left him, cut down to the roots and withered, and, so far from relieving or assisting him in their turns, would not so much as know or look upon him. This has made him turn digger; and here, in his skin garment, he tills the earth for hire; ashamed to show himself in the city, and venting his rage against the ingratitude of those who, enriched as they had been by him, now proudly pass along, and know not whether his name is Timon." Jupiter resolves to despatch Mercury and Plutus to bestow new wealth upon Timon, and the god of riches very reluctantly consents to go, because, if he return to Timon, he should again become the prey of parasites and courtezans.

The subsequent dialogue between Mercury and Plutus, upon the use of riches, is exceedingly acute and amusing. The gods, upon approaching Timon, descry him working with his spade, in company with Labour, Poverty, Wisdom, Courage, and all the virtues that are in the train of indigence. Poverty thus addresses Plutus:—"You come to find Timon; and as to me who have received him enervated by luxury, he would forsake me when I have rendered him virtuous; you come to enrich him anew, which will render him as before, idle, effeminate, and besotted." Timon rejects the offers which Plutus makes him; and the gods leave him, desiring him to continue digging. He then finds gold, and thus apostrophizes it:—"It is, it must be, gold, fine, yellow, noble gold; heavy, sweet to behold. . . . Burning like fire, thou shinest day and night: come to me, thou dear delightful treasure! now do I believe that Jove himself was once turned into gold: what virgin would not spread forth her bosom to receive so beautiful a lover?" But the Timon of Lucian has other uses for his riches than Plutus anticipated;—he will guard them without employing them; he will, as he says, "purchase some retired spot, there build a tower* to keep my gold in, and live for myself alone: this shall be my habitation; and, when I am dead, my sepulchre also: from this time forth it is my fixed resolution to have no commerce or connexion with mankind, but to despise and avoid it. I will pay no regard to acquaintance, friendship, pity, or compassion: to pity the distressed, or to relieve the indigent, I shall consider as a weakness,—nay, as a crime; my life, like the beasts of the field, shall be spent in solitude, and Timon alone shall be Timon's friend. I will treat all beside as enemies and betrayers; to converse with them were profanation; to herd with them, impiety: accursed be the day that brings them to my sight!" The most agreeable name to me, he adds, shall be that of Misanthrope. A crowd approach who have heard of his good fortune; and first comes Gnathon, a parasite, who brings

* A building called the Tower of Timon is mentioned by Pausanias.

him a new poem—a dithyrambe. Timon strikes him down with his spade. Another, and another, succeeds; and one comes from the senate to hail him as the safeguard of the Athenians. Each in his turn is welcomed with blows. The dialogue concludes with Timon's determination to mount upon a rock, and to receive every man with a shower of stones.

There can be no doubt, we think, that a great resemblance may be traced between the Greek satirist and the English dramatist. The false friends of Timon are much more fully described by Lucian than by Plutarch. The finding the gold is the same,—the rejection of it by the Timon of Shakspeare is essentially the same: the Poet of the play was perhaps suggested by the flatterer who came with the new ode;—the senator with his congratulations is not very different from the senators in the drama;—the blows and stones are found both in the ancient and the modern. There are minor similarities which might be readily traced, if we believed that Shakspeare had gone direct to Lucian. But our opinion is that he found those similarities in the play which we are convinced he remodelled. It is in the conception and the execution of the character of Timon that the original power of Shakspeare is to be traced.

The vices of Shakspeare's Timon are not the vices of a sensualist. It is true that his offices have been oppressed with riotous feeders,—that his vaults have wept with drunken spilth of wine,—that every room

“Hath blaz'd with lights, and bray'd with minstrelsy;”

but he has nothing selfish in the enjoyment of his prodigality and his magnificence. He himself truly expresses the weakness, as well as the beauty, of his own character: “Why, I have often wished myself poorer, that I might come nearer to you. We are born to do benefits, and what better or properer can we call our own, than the riches of our friends? O, what a precious comfort 't is, to have so many, like brothers, commanding one another's fortunes!” Charles Lamb, in his contrast between ‘Timon of Athens’ and Hogarth's ‘Rake's Progress,’ has scarcely done justice

to Timon: “The wild course of riot and extravagance, ending in the one with driving the Prodigal from the society of men into the solitude of the deserts; and, in the other, with conducting Hogarth's Rake through his several stages of dissipation into the still more complete desolations of the mad-house, in the play and in the picture are described with almost equal force and nature.” Hogarth's Rake is all sensuality and selfishness; Timon is essentially high-minded and generous: he truly says, in the first chill of his fortunes,—

“No villainous bounty yet hath pass'd my heart.
Unwisely, not ignobly, have I given.”

In his splendid speech to Apemantus in the fourth act, he distinctly proclaims that, in the weakness with which he had lavished his fortunes upon the unworthy, he had not pampered his own passions—

“Hadst thou, like us, from our first swath, proceeded

The sweet degrees that this brief world affords
To such as may the passive drugs of it
Freely command, thou wouldst have plunged
thyself

In general riot; melted down thy youth
In different beds of lust; and never learn'd
The icy precepts of respect, but follow'd
The sugar'd game before thee. But myself,
Who had the world as my confectionary;
The mouth, the tongues, the eyes, and hearts
of men

At duty, more than I could frame employment;

That numberless upon me stuck, as leaves
Do on the oak, have with one winter's brush
Fell from their boughs, and left me open, bare
For every storm that blows.”

The all-absorbing defect of Timon—the root of those generous vices which wear the garb of virtue—is the entire want of discrimination, by which he is also characterized in Lucian's dialogue. Shakspeare has seized upon this point, and held firmly to it. He releases Ventidius from prison,—he bestows an estate upon his servant,—he lavishes jewels upon all the dependants who crowd his board;—

“Methinks I could deal kingdoms to my friends,
And ne'er be weary.”

That universal philanthropy, of which the most selfish men sometimes talk, is in Timon an active principle; but let it be observed that he has no preferences. It appears to us a most remarkable example of the profound sagacity of Shakspeare, to exhibit Timon without any especial affections. It is thus that his philanthropy passes without any violence into the extreme of universal hatred to mankind. Had he loved a single human being with that intensity which constitutes affection in the relation of the sexes, and friendship in the relation of man to man, he would have been exempt from that unjudging lavishness which was necessary to satisfy his morbid craving for human sympathy. Shakspeare, we think, has kept this most steadily in view. His surprise at the fidelity of his steward is exhibited, as if the love for any human being in preference to another came upon him like a new sensation:—

Flav. I beg of you to know me, good my lord,
To accept my grief, and whilst this poor wealth lasts,
To entertain me as your steward still.

Tim. Had I a steward
So true, so just, and now so comfortable?
It almost turns my dangerous nature wild.
Let me behold thy face.—Surely, this man
Was born of woman.—
Forgive my general and exceptless rashness,
You perpetual-sober gods! I do proclaim
One honest man,—mistake me not,—but one;
No more, I pray,—and he is a steward.—
How fain would I have hated all mankind,
And thou redeem'st thyself! But all, save thee,
I fell with curses.”

With this key to Timon's character, it appears to us that we may properly understand the “general and exceptless rashness” of his misanthropy. The only relations in which he stood to mankind are utterly destroyed. In lavishing his wealth as if it were a common property, he had believed that the same common property would flow back to him in his hour of adversity. “O, you gods, think I, what need we have any friends, if we should never have need of them? they were the most needless creatures living, should we

ne'er have use for them: and would most resemble sweet instruments hung up in cases, that keep their sounds to themselves.” His false confidence is at once, and irreparably, destroyed. If Timon had possessed one friend with whom he could have interchanged confidence upon equal terms, he would have been saved from his fall, and certainly from his misanthropy. If he had even fallen by false confidence, he would have confined his hatred to his

“Most smiling, smooth, detested parasites,
Courteous destroyers, affable wolves, meek bears.”

But his nature has sustained a complete revulsion, because his sympathies were forced, exaggerated, artificial. It is then that all social life becomes to him an object of abomination:—

“Piety and fear,
Religion to the gods, peace, justice, truth,
Domestic awe, night-rest, and neighbourhood,
Instruction, manners, mysteries, and trades,
Degrees, observances, customs, and laws,
Decline to your confounding contraries,
And yet confusion live!—Plagues incident to men,
Your potent and infectious fevers heap
On Athens, ripe for stroke! thou cold sciatica,
Cripple our senators, that their limbs may halt
As lamely as their manners! lust and liberty
Creep in the minds and marrows of our youth;
That 'gainst the stream of virtue they may strive,
And drown themselves in riot! itches, blains,
Sow all the Athenian bosoms; and their crop
Be general leprosy; breath infect breath;
That their society, as their friendship, may
Be merely poison!”

Nothing can be more tremendous than this imprecation,—nothing, under the circumstances, more true and natural.

It is observed by Ulrici that the misanthropy of Timon is as idealized as his philanthropy. “But, as that idealized philanthropy was his life's element, the equally idealized misanthropy was a choke-damp in which he could not long breathe: his destroying rage against himself, and all human kind, must of course first destroy himself.” Considering Timon's artificial love of mankind and his artificial

hate as the results of the same ill-regulated temperament, we can appreciate the beautiful distinction which Shakspeare has drawn between the intellectual cynicism of Apemantus and the passionate misanthropy of Timon. The misanthropy of Timon is not practical—it wastes itself in generalizations; the misanthropy of Apemantus is not imaginative—it gratifies itself in petty insults and unkindnesses:—

Apem. I love thee better now than e'er I did.

Tim. I hate thee worse.

Apem. Why?

Tim. Thou flatter'st misery.

Apem. I flatter not; but say thou art a caitiff.

Tim. Why dost thou seek me out?

Apem. To vex thee.

Tim. Always a villain's office, or a fool's;
Dost please thyself in 't?

Apem. Ay.

Tim. What! a knave too?"

The soldier, the courtesan, the thief, are equally included in Timon's fiery denunciations; but they are all equally gratified in essentials. The equanimity with which the fair companions of Alcibiades submit to his railings, when accompanied by his gifts, is profoundly satirical:—

"More counsel with more money, bounteous Timon."

It tells, in a word, the impotence of his misanthropy. It is cherished for his own gratification alone. Deeper than this fancy of hatred to the human race lies the romantic feeling with which he cherishes images of tranquillity beyond this agitating life:—

"Come not to me again: but say to Athens,
Timon hath made his everlasting mansion
Upon the beached verge of the salt flood;
Whom once a day with his embossed froth
The turbulent surge shall cover."

The novelist of the 'Palace of Pleasure' thus explains Timon's choice of "his everlasting mansion:"—"He ordained himself to be interred upon the sea-shore, that the waves and surges might beat and vex his dead carcass." Shakspeare has made Alcibiades furnish a more poetical solution of this choice, which is at the same time a key to Timon's general character:—

"Though thou abhorr'dst in us our human griefs,
Scorn'dst our brain's flow, and those our drop-
lets which
From niggard nature fall, yet *rich conceit*
Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for
aye
On thy low grave, on faults forgiven."

CHAPTER V.

ARDEN OF FEVERSHAM.

IN 1592 was first published 'The lamentable and true Tragedie of M. Arden of Feversham in Kent.' Subsequent editions of this tragedy appeared in 1599 and 1633. Lillo, the author of 'George Barnwell,' who died in 1739, left an unfinished tragedy upon the same subject, in which he has used the play of the 16th century very freely, but with considerable judgment. In 1770 the 'Arden of Feversham' originally published in 1592 was for the first time ascribed to Shakspeare. It was then reprinted by Edward Jacob, a resident of Feversham (who also published a history

of that town and port), with a preface, in which he endeavours to prove that the tragedy was written by Shakspeare, upon the fallacious principle that it contains certain expressions which are to be found in his acknowledged works. This is at once the easiest and the most unsatisfactory species of evidence. Resemblances such as this may consist of mere conventional phrases, the common property of all the writers of a particular period. If the phrases are so striking that they must have been first created by an individual process of thought, the repetition

of them is no proof that they have been twice used by the same person. Another may have adopted the phrase, perhaps unconsciously. General resemblances of style lead us into a wider range of inquiry; but even here we have a narrow inclosed ground compared with the entire field of criticism, which includes not only style, but the whole system of the poet's art. It has been said of this play, "Arden of Feversham, a domestic tragedy, would, in point of absolute merit, have done no discredit to the early manhood of Shakspeare himself; but, both in conception and execution, it is quite unlike even his earliest manner; while, on the other hand, its date cannot possibly be removed so far back as the time before which his own style had demonstrably been formed." * Tieck has translated the tragedy into German, and he assigns it with little hesitation to Shakspeare. Ulrici also subscribes to this opinion; but he makes a lower estimate of its merit than his brother critic. The versification he holds to be tedious and monotonous, and the dialogue, he says, is conducted with much exaggeration of expression. The play appears to us deserving of a somewhat full consideration. It was printed as early as 1592, and was most probably performed several years earlier; the event which forms its subject took place in 1551. What is very remarkable too for a play of this period (and in this opinion we differ from Ulrici), there is very little extravagance of language; and the criminal passion in all its stages is conducted with singular delicacy. There are many passages too which aim to be poetical, and are in fact poetical; but for the most part they want that vivifying dramatic power which makes the poetry doubly effective from its natural and inseparable union with the situation which calls it forth and the character which gives it utterance. The tragedy is founded upon a real event which had been popularly told with great minuteness of detail; and the dramatist has evidently thought it necessary to present all the points of the story, and in so doing has of course sometimes divided and weakened the interest. Of invention, properly so

* Edinburgh Review, vol. lxxi. p. 471.

called, there is necessarily very little; but there is still some invention, and that of a nature to show that the author had an imaginative conception of incident and character. Upon the whole, we should be inclined to regard it as the work of a young man; and the question then arises whether that young man was Shakspeare. If 'Arden of Feversham,' like the 'Yorkshire Tragedy,' had been founded upon an event which happened in Shakspeare's mature years, that circumstance would have been decisive against his being in any sense of the word the author. But whilst we agree with the writer in the 'Edinburgh Review' that "both in conception and execution it is quite unlike even his earliest manner," we are not so confident that "its date cannot possibly be removed so far back as the time before which his own style had demonstrably been formed." Whether it be due to the absorbing nature of the subject, or to the mode in which the story is dramatically treated, we think that 'Arden of Feversham' cannot be read for the first time without exciting a very considerable interest; and this interest is certainly not produced by any violent exhibitions of passion, any sudden transitions of situation, or any exciting display of rhetoric or poetry; but by a quiet and natural succession of incidents, by a tolerably consistent, if not highly forcible, delineation of character, and by equable and unambitious dialogue, in which there is certainly less extravagance of expression than we should readily find in any of the writers for the stage between 1585 and 1592. Do we then think that 'Arden of Feversham' belongs to the early manhood of Shakspeare? We do not think so with any confidence; but we do think that, considering its date, it is a very remarkable play, and we should be at a loss to assign it to any writer whose name is associated with that early period of the drama, except to Shakspeare. In questions of this nature there may be a conviction resulting from an examination of the whole evidence, the reasons for which cannot be satisfactorily communicated to others. But we are less anxious to make our readers think with us than to enable them to think for themselves; and we

shall endeavour to effect this object in the analysis to which we now proceed.

The murder of Arden of Feversham must have produced an extraordinary and even permanent sensation in an age when deeds of violence were by no means unfrequent. Holinshed's 'Chronicle' was first published in 1577; the event happened twenty-six years before, but the writer of the 'Chronicle' says, "The which murder, for the horribleness thereof, although otherwise it may seem to be but a private matter, and therefore as it were impertinent to this history, I have thought good to set it forth somewhat at large, having the instructions delivered to me by them that have used some diligence to gather the true understanding of the circumstances." The narrative in Holinshed occupies seven closely printed columns, and all the details are brought out with a remarkable graphic power. We have no doubt that this narrative strongly seized upon the imagination of the writer of the play. To judge correctly of the poetical art of that writer, we must follow the narrative step by step. The relative position of the several parties is thus described:—

"This Arden was a man of a tall and comely personage, and matched in marriage with a gentlewoman, young, tall, and well favoured of shape and countenance, who chancing to fall in familiarity with one Mosbie, a tailor by occupation, a black swart man, servant to the Lord North, it happened this Mosbie upon some mistaking to fall out with her; but she, being desirous to be in favour with him again, sent him a pair of silver dice by one Adam Foule, dwelling at the Flower-de-luce, in Feversham. After which he resorted to her again, and oftentimes lay in Arden's house; and although (as it was said) Arden perceived right well their mutual familiarity to be much greater than their honesty, yet because he would not offend her, and so lose the benefit he hoped to gain at some of her friends' hands in bearing with her lewdness, which he might have lost if he should have fallen out with her, he was contented to wink at her filthy disorder, and both permitted and also invited Mosbie very often to lodge in his house. And thus it continued a good space before any practice was begun by them against

Master Arden. She at length, inflamed in love with Mosbie, and loathing her husband, wished, and after practised, the means how to hasten his end."

The first evidence of a sound judgment in the dramatist is the rejection of the imputation of the chronicler that Arden connived at the conduct of his wife from mercenary motives. In the opening scene he puts Arden in a thoroughly different position. The play opens with a dialogue between Master Arden and his friend Master Franklin, in which Franklin exhorts him to cheer up his spirits because the king has granted him letters-patent of the lands of the abbey of Feversham. This is the answer of Arden:—

"Franklin, thy love prolongs my weary life;
And but for thee, how odious were this life,
That shows me nothing, but torments my
soul;
And those foul objects that offend mine eyes,
Which make me wish that, for this veil of
heaven,*
The earth hung over my head and cover'd me!
Love-letters post 'twixt Mosbie and my wife,
And they have privy meetings in the town;
Nay, on his finger did I spy the ring
Which, at our marriage, the priest put on:
Can any grief be half so great as this?"

Presently Arden breaks out into a burst of passion, and Franklin thus counsels him:—

"Be patient, gentle friend, and learn of me
To ease thy grief and save her chastity:
Entreat her fair; sweet words are fittest
engines
To raze the flint walls of a woman's breast;
In any case be not too jealous,
Nor make no question of her love to thee,
But, as securely, presently take horse,
And lie with me at London all this term;
For women when they may, will not,
But, being kept back, straight grow out-
rageous."

Alice, the wife of Arden, enters; and he accuses her, but mildly, of having called on Mosbie in her sleep; the woman dissembles, and they part in peace. We have then the incident of the silver dice sent to the para-

* For—instead of.

mour by Adam of the Flower-de-luce. The chronicler has represented Alice as the principal agent in procuring the murder of her husband; and the dramatist has, it appears to us with considerable skill, shown the woman from the first under the influence of a headlong passion, which cannot stop to conceal its purposes, which has no doubts, no suspicions, no fears. The earnestness with which she proceeds in her terrible design is thoroughly tragic; and her ardour is strikingly contrasted with the more cautious guilt of her chief accomplice. She avows her passion for Mosbie to the landlord of the Flower-de-luce; she openly prompts Arden's own servant Michael to murder his master, tempting him with a promise to promote his suit to Mosbie's sister. The first scene between Mosbie and Alice is a striking one:—

Mosbie. Where is your husband?

Alice. 'T is now high water, and he is at the quay.

Mosbie. There let him; henceforward, know me not.

Alice. Is this the end of all thy solemn oaths?

Is this the fruit thy reconciliation buds?

Have I for this given thee so many favours,

Incurr'd my husband's hate, and out, alas!

Made shipwreck of mine honour for thy sake?

And dost thou say, henceforward know me not?

Remember when I lock'd thee in my closet,

What were thy words and mine? Did we not both

Decree to murder Arden in the night?

The heavens can witness, and the world can tell,

Before I saw that falsehood look of thine,

'Fore I was tangled with thy 'ticing speech,

Arden to me was dearer than my soul,—

And shall be still. Base peasant, get thee gone,

And boast not of thy conquest over me,

Gotten by witchcraft and mere sorcery,

For what hast thou to countenance my love,

Being descended of a noble house,

And match'd already with a gentleman,

Whose servant thou mayst be;—and so, farewell.

Mosbie. Ungentle and unkind Alice, now I see

That which I ever fear'd, and find too true:

A woman's love is as the lightning flame,

Which even in bursting forth consumes itself.

To try thy constancy have I been strange:

Would I had never tried, but liv'd in hopes!

Alice. What needs thou try me, whom thou never found false?

Mosbie. Yet, pardon me, for love is jealous.

Alice. So lists the sailor to the mermaid's song;

So looks the traveller to the basilisk.

I am content for to be reconcil'd,

And that I know will be mine overthrow.

Mosbie. Thine overthrow? First let the world dissolve.

Alice. Nay, Mosbie, let me still enjoy thy love,

And happen what will, I am resolute."

It is impossible to doubt, whoever was the writer of this play, that we have before us the work of a man of no ordinary power. The transitions of passion in this scene are true to nature; and, instead of the extravagant ravings of the writers of this early period of our drama, the appropriateness of the language to the passion is most remarkable. There is poetry too, in the ordinary sense of the word, but the situation is not encumbered with the ornament. We would remark also, what is very striking throughout the play, that the versification possesses that freedom which we find in no other writer of the time but Shakspeare. Ulrici holds a contrary opinion, but we cannot consent to surrender our judgment to a foreign ear. There is too in this scene the condensation of Shakspeare, that wonderful quality by which he makes a single word convey a complex idea:—

"Is this the fruit thy reconciliation buds?"

is an example of this quality. The whole scene is condensed. A writer of less genius, whoever he was, would have made it thrice as long. The guilty pair being reconciled, Mosbie says that he has found a painter who can so cunningly produce a picture that the person looking on it shall die. Alice is for more direct measures—for a poison to be given in her husband's food. Here again the 'Chronicle' is followed:—

"There was a painter dwelling in Feversham, who had skill of poisons, as was reported; she therefore demanded of him whether it were true that he had such skill in feat or not? And he denied not but that he had indeed. Yea, said she, but I would have such a one made as should have most vehement and speedy operation to despatch the eater thereof. That can I do, quoth he; and forthwith made her such a one.

The painter enters, and his reward, it appears, is to be Susan Mosbie. The painter is a dangerous and wicked person, but he speaks of his art and of its inspiration with a high enthusiasm:—

"For, as sharp-witted poets, *whose sweet verse*
Make heavenly gods break off their nectar-
draughts,

And lay their ears down to the lowly earth,
Use humble promise to their sacred muse;

So we, that are the poets' favourites,
Must have a love. Ay, love is the painter's
muse,

That makes him frame a speaking counte-
nance,

A weeping eye that witnesseth heart's grief."

The conference is interrupted by the entrance of Arden, of whom Mosbie readily asks about the abbey-lands. The following scene ensues, and it is an example of the judgment with which the dramatist has adopted the passage from the 'Chronicle' that Arden "both permitted and also invited Mosbie very often to lodge in his house," without at the same time compromising his own honour:—

"Arden. Mosbie, that question we'll decide anon.

Alice, make ready my breakfast, I must hence.

[Exit ALICE.

As for the lands, Mosbie, they are mine

By letters-patent of his majesty.

But I must have a mandat for my wife;

They say you seek to rob me of her love:

Villain, what mak'st thou in her company?

She's no companion for so base a groom.

Mosbie. Arden, I thought not on her, I
came to thee;

But rather than I'll put up this wrong—

Franklin. What will you do, sir?

Mosbie. Revenge it on the proudest of you
both.

[Then ARDEN draws forth MOSBIE'S sword.

Arden. So, sirrah, you may not wear a sword,

The statute made against artificers forbids it. I warrant that I do*. Now use your bodkin, Your Spanish needle, and your pressing-iron; For this shall go with me: And mark my words,—

You, Goodman butcher, 't is to you I speak,— The next time that I take thee near my house, Instead of legs, I'll make thee crawl on stumps.

Mosbie. Ah, master Arden, you have injured me,

I do appeal to God and to the world.

Franklin. Why, canst thou deny thou wert a butcher once?

Mosbie. Measure me what I am, not what I once was.

Arden. Why, what art thou now but a velvet drudge,

A cheating steward, and base-minded peasant?

Mosbie. Arden, now hast thou belch'd and vomited

The rancorous venom of thy mis-swoln heart, Hear me but speak: As I intend to live

With God, and his elected saints in heaven,

I never meant more to solicit her,

And that she knows; and all the world shall see:

I lov'd her once, sweet Arden; pardon me:

I could not choose; her beauty fir'd my heart;

But time hath quenched these once-raging coals;

And, Arden, though I frequent thine house,

'T is for my sister's sake, her waiting-maid,

And not for hers. Mayst thou enjoy her long!

Hell fire and wrathful vengeance light on me If I dishonour her, or injure thee!

Arden. With these thy protestations

The deadly hatred of my heart's appeas'd,

And thou and I'll be friends if this prove true.

As for the base terms that I gave thee late,

Forget them, Mosbie; I had cause to speak,

When all the knights and gentlemen of Kent

Make common table-talk of her and thee.

Mosbie. Who lives that is not touch'd with slanderous tongues?

Franklin. Then, Mosbie, to eschew the speech of men,

Upon whose general bruit all honour hangs,

Forbear his house.

Arden. Forbear it! nay, rather frequent it more:

* I justify that which I do.

The world shall see that I distrust her not.
To warn him on the sudden from my house
Were to confirm the rumour that is grown."

The first direct attempt of Alice upon her husband's life is thus told by the chronicler :—

"Now, Master Arden purposing that day to ride to Canterbury, his wife brought him his breakfast, which was wont to be milk and butter. He, having received a spoonful or two of the milk, misliked the taste and colour thereof, and said to his wife, Mistress Alice, what milk have you given me here? Where-withal she tilted it over with her hand, saying, I ween nothing can please you. Then he took horse and rode towards Canterbury, and by the way fell into extreme sickness, and so escaped for that time."

In the tragedy the incident is exactly followed. Upon parting with her husband the dissembling of Alice is heart-sickening, but the scene is still managed naturally and consistently.

There is no division of this play into acts and scenes, but it is probable that the first act ends with the departure of Arden for London. Another agent appears upon the scene, whose motives and position are thus described in the 'Chronicle':—

"After this his wife fell in acquaintance with one Greene, of Feversham, servant to Sir Anthony Ager, from which Greene Master Arden had wrested a piece of ground on the back side of the Abbey of Feversham, and there had great blows and great threats passed betwixt them about that matter. Therefore she, knowing that Greene hated her husband, began to practise with him how to make him away; and concluded that, if he could get any that would kill him, he should have ten pounds for a reward."

The manner in which the guilty wife practises with this revengeful man is skilfully wrought out in the tragedy. She sympathises with his supposed wrongs, she tells a tale of her own injuries, and then she proceeds to the open avowal of her purpose. Greene is to procure agents to murder her husband, and his reward, besides money, is to be the restoration of his lands. She communicates her proceedings to Mosbie, but

he reproaches her for her imprudence in tampering with so many agents.

The course of the 'Chronicle' continues to be followed with much exactness. The scene changes to the road for London, and the following description is then dramatized. It is so curious a picture of manners, as indeed the whole narrative is, that we need scarcely apologize for its length :—

"This Greene, having doings for his master Sir Anthony Ager, had occasion to go up to London, where his master then lay, and, having some charge up with him, desired one Bradshaw, a goldsmith of Feversham, that was his neighbour, to accompany him to Gravesend, and he would content him for his pains. This Bradshaw, being a very honest man, was content, and rode with him. And when they came to Rainhamdown they chanced to see three or four servingmen that were coming from Leeds; and therewith Bradshaw espied, coming up the hill from Rochester, one Black Will, a terrible cruel ruffian, with a sword and a buckler, and another with a great staff on his neck. Then said Bradshaw to Greene, We are happy that there cometh some company from Leeds, for here cometh up against us as murdering a knave as any is in England: if it were not for them, we might chance hardly escape without loss of our money and lives. Yea, thought Greene (as he after confessed), such a one is for my purpose; and therefore asked, Which is he? Yonder is he, quoth Bradshaw, the same that hath the sword and buckler; his name is Black Will. How know you that? said Greene. Bradshaw answered, I knew him at Boulogne, where we both served; he was a soldier and I was Sir Richard Cavendish's man; and there he committed many robberies and heinous murders on such as travelled betwixt Boulogne and France. By this time the other company of servingmen came to them, and they, going altogether, met with Black Will and his fellow. The servingmen knew Black Will, and, saluting him, demanded of him whither he went? He answered, By his blood (for his use was to swear almost at every word), I know not, nor care not; but set up my staff, and even as it falleth I go. If thou, quoth they, will go back again to Gravesend, we will give thee thy supper. By his blood, said he, I care not; I am content; have with you: and so he returned again with them. Then 'Black Will took acquaintance of Brad-

shaw, saying, Fellow Bradshaw, how dost thou? Bradshaw, unwilling to renew acquaintance, or to have aught to do with so shameless a ruffian, said, Why, do ye know me? Yea, that I do, quoth he; did not we serve in Boulogne together? But ye must pardon me, quoth Bradshaw, for I have forgotten you. Then Greene talked with Black Will, and said, When ye have supped, come to mine host's house at such a sign, and I will give you the sack and sugar. By his blood, said he, I thank you; I will come and take it, I warrant you. According to his promise he came, and there they made good cheer. Then Black Will and Greene went and talked apart from Bradshaw, and there concluded together, that if he would kill Master Arden he should have ten pounds for his labour. Then he answered, By his wounds, that I will if I may know him. Marry, to-morrow in Paul's I will show him thee, said Greene. Then they left their talk, and Greene bad him go home to his host's house. Then Greene wrote a letter to Mistress Arden, and among other things put in these words,—We have got a man for our purpose; we may thank my brother Bradshaw. Now Bradshaw, not knowing anything of this, took the letter of him, and in the morning departed home again, and delivered the letter to Mistress Arden, and Greene and Black Will went up to London at the tide."

The scene in the play seizes upon the principal points of this description, but the variations are those of a master. Bradshaw, it seems, is a goldsmith, and he is involved in a charge of buying some stolen plate. He thus describes the man who sold it him, and we can scarcely avoid thinking that here is the same power, though in an inferior degree, which produced the description of the apothecary in 'Romeo and Juliet':—

Will. What manner of man was he?

Brad. A lean-faced writhen knave,
Hawk-nosed and very hollow-eyed;
With mighty furrows in stormy brows;
Long hair down to his shoulders curl'd;
His chin was bare, but on his upper lip
A mutchado, which he wound about his ear.

Will. What apparel had he?

Brad. A watchet satin doublet all to-torn:
The inner side did bear the greater show:
A pair of threadbare velvet hose seam-rent;
A worsted stocking rent above the shoe;

A livery cloak, but all the lace was off;
'T was bad, but yet it serv'd to hide the plate."

One of the sources of the enchaining interest of this drama is to be found in the repeated escapes of Arden from the machinations of his enemies. We have seen the poison fail, and now the ruffian, whom no ordinary circumstances deterred from the commission of his purpose, is to be defeated by an unforeseen casualty. The 'Chronicle' says,—

"At the time appointed Greene showed Black Will Master Arden walking in Paul's. Then said Black Will, What is he that goeth after him? Marry, said Greene, one of his men. By his blood, said Black Will, I will kill them both. Nay, said Greene, do not so, for he is of counsel with us in this matter. By his blood, said he, I care not for that; I will kill them both. Nay, said Greene, in any wise do not so. Then Black Will thought to have killed Master Arden in Paul's churchyard, but there were so many gentlemen that accompanied him to dinner, that he missed of his purpose."

The dramatist presents the scene much more strikingly to the senses, in a manner which tells us something of the inconveniences of old London. The ruffians are standing before a shop; an apprentice enters saying—

"'T is very late, I were best shut up my stall, for here will be old* filching when the press comes forth of Paul's."

The stage direction which follows is:—"Then lets he down his window, and it breaks Black Will's head." The accident disturbs the immediate purpose of the ruffians. The character of Black Will is drawn with great force, but there is probably something of a youthful judgment in making the murderer speak in high poetry:—

"I tell thee, Greene, the forlorn traveller,
Whose lips are glued with summer-scorching
heat,
Ne'er long'd so much to see a running brook
As I to finish Arden's tragedy."

The other ruffian is Shakebag, and in the same way he speaks in the language which a youthful poet scarcely knows how to avoid

* Old—excessive.

summoning from the depths of his own imagination :—

“I cannot paint my valour out with words:
But give me place and opportunity.
Such mercy as the starven lioness,
When she is dry suck'd of her eager young,
Shows to the prey that next encounters her,
On Arden so much pity would I take.”

The propriety of putting poetical images in the mouths of the low agents of crime cannot exactly be judged by looking at such passages apart from that by which they are surrounded. There is no comedy in ‘Arden of Feversham.’ The characters and events are lifted out of ordinary life of purpose by the poet. The ambition of a young writer may have carried this too far, but the principle upon which he worked was a right one. He aimed to produce something higher than a literal copy of every-day life, and this constitutes the essential distinction between ‘Arden of Feversham’ and the ‘Yorkshire Tragedy,’ as between Shakspeare and Heywood, and Shakspeare and Lillo. In the maturity of his genius Shakspeare did not vulgarize even his murderers. At the instant before the assault upon Banquo, one of the guilty instruments of Macbeth says, in the very spirit of poetry,—

“The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day:
Now spurs the lated traveller apace,
To gain the timely inn.”

Early in the drama, as we have seen, Alice proposes to her husband's servant to make away with his master. The circumstance has come to the knowledge of Greene, who, after the defeat of the plan through the apprentice's shutter, has to devise with his ruffians another mode of accomplishing Arden's death. The ‘Chronicle’ thus tells the story :—

“Greene showed all this talk to Master Arden's man, whose name was Michael, which ever after stood in doubt of Black Will, lest he should kill him. The cause that this Michael conspired with the rest against his master was, for that it was determined that he should marry a kinswoman of Mosbie's. After this, Master Arden lay at a certain parsonage which he held in London, and therefore his man Michael and

Greene agreed that Black Will should come in the night to the parsonage, where he should find the doors left open that he might come in and murder Master Arden.”

The scene in which Michael consents to this proposal, with great reluctance, is founded upon the above text. We have a scene of Arden and Franklin, before they go to bed, in which Arden is torn with apprehension of the dishonour of his wife. There is great power here; but there is something of a higher order in the conflicting terrors of Michael when he is left alone, expecting the arrival of the pitiless murderer :—

“Conflicting thoughts, encamped in my breast,
Awake me with the echo of their strokes;
And I, a judge to censure either side,
Can give to neither wished victory.
My master's kindness pleads to me for life,
With just demand, and I must grant it him:
My mistress she hath forc'd me with an oath,
For Susan's sake, the which I may not break,
For that is nearer than a master's love:
That grim-fac'd fellow, pitiless Black Will,
And Shakebag stern, in bloody stratagem
(Two rougher ruffians never liv'd in Kent)
Have sworn my death if I infringe my vow—
A dreadful thing to be consider'd of.
Methinks I see them with their bolster'd hair,
Staring and grinning in *thy* gentle face,
And, in their ruthless hands their daggers
drawn,
Insulting o'er thee with a peck of oaths,
Whilst thou, submissive pleading for relief,
Art mangled by their ireful instruments!
Methinks I hear them ask where Michael is,
And pitiless Black Will cries, ‘Stab the slave;
The peasant will detect the tragedy.’
The wrinkles of his foul death-threatening face
Gape open wide like graves to swallow men:
My death to him is but a merriment;
And he will murder me to make him sport.—
He comes! he comes! Master Franklin, help;
Call up the neighbours, or we are but dead.”

This in a young poet would not only be promise of future greatness, but it would be the greatness itself. The conception of this scene is wholly original. The guilty coward, driven by the force of his imagination into an agony of terror so as to call for help, and thus defeat the plot in which he had been an accomplice, is a creation of real genius. The

transition of his fears, from the picture of the murder of his master to that of himself, has a profundity in it which we seldom find except in the conceptions of one dramatist. The narrative upon which the scene is founded offers us a mere glimpse of this most effective portion of the story :—

“This Michael, having his master to bed, left open the doors according to the appointment. His master, then being in bed, asked him if he had shut fast the doors, and he said Yea; but yet afterwards, fearing lest Black Will would kill him as well as his master, after he was in bed himself he rose again, and shut the doors, bolting them fast.”

In the drama the ruffians arrive, and are of course disappointed of their purpose by the closing of the doors. They swear revenge against Michael, but he subsequently makes his peace by informing them that his master is departing from London, and that their purpose may be accomplished on Rainham-down.

The scene now changes, with a skilful dramatic management, to exhibit to us the guilty pair at Feversham. Mosbie is alone, and he shows us the depth of his depravity in the following soliloquy :—

“*Mosbie.* Disturbed thoughts drive me from company,

And dry my marrow with their watchfulness;
Continual trouble of my moody brain
Feebles my body by excess of drink,
And nips me as the bitter north-east wind
Doth check the tender blossoms in the spring.
Well fares the man, howe'er his cates do taste,
That tables not with foul suspicion;
And he but pines among his delicates
Whose troubled mind is stuff'd with discontent.

My golden time was when I had no gold;
Though then I wanted, yet I slept secure;
My daily toil begat me night's repose,
My night's repose made daylight fresh to me:
But since I climb'd the top bough of the tree,
And sought to build my nest among the clouds,
Each gentle stary* gale doth shake my bed,
And makes me dread my downfall to the earth.
But whither doth contemplation carry me?

* *Stary*—stirring. Our word *star* is supposed to be derived from the Anglo-Saxon *stir-an*, to move.

The way I seek to find where pleasure dwells
Is hedg'd behind me, that I cannot back,
But needs must on, although to danger's gate.
Then, Arden, perish thou by that decree;
For Greene doth heir the land, and weed thee
up

To make my harvest nothing but pure corn;
And for his pains I'll heave him up awhile,
And after smother him to have his wax;
Such bees as Greene must never live to sting.
Then is there Michael, and the painter too,
Chief actors to Arden's overthrow,
Who, when they see me sit in Arden's seat,
They will insult upon me for my meed,
Or fright me by detecting of his end:
I'll none of that, for I can cast a bone
To make these curs pluck out each other's
throat,

And then am I sole ruler of mine own:
Yet Mistress Arden lives, but she's myself,
And holy church-rites make us two but one.
But what for that? I may not trust you,
Alice!

You have supplanted Arden for my sake,
And will extirpen me to plant another;
'Tis fearful sleeping in a serpent's bed;
And I will cleanly rid my hands of her.
But here she comes; and I must flatter her.

[*Here enters ALICE.*”

The unhappy woman has already begun to pay the penalty of her sin: she has moments of agonizing remorse, not enduring, however, but to be swept away again by that tempest of passion which first hurried her into guilt. The following scene is, we think, unmatched by any other writer than Shakspeare in a play published as early as 1592, perhaps written several years earlier. It might have been written by Webster or Ford, but they belong to a considerably later period. It possesses in a most remarkable degree that quiet strength which is the best evidence of real power. Except in Shakspeare, it is a strength for which we shall vainly seek in the accredited writings of any dramatic poet who, as far as we know, had written for the stage some ten years before the close of the sixteenth century :—

“*Mosbie.* Ungentle Alice, thy sorrow is my sore;

Thou know'st it well; and 't is thy policy
To forge distressful looks to wound a breast

Where lies a heart that dies when thou art
sad :

It is not love that loves to anger love.

Alice. It is not love that loves to murder
love.

Mosbie. How mean you that ?

Alice. Thou know'st how dearly Arden
loved me.

Mosbie. And then——

Alice. And then conceal the rest, for 't is
too bad,

Lest that my words be carried with the wind,
And publish'd in the world to both our
shames !

I pray thee, Mosbie, let our spring-time
wither ;

Our harvest else will yield but loathsome
weeds :

Forget, I pray thee, what has pass'd betwixt
us,

For now I blush and tremble at the thoughts.

Mosbie. What, are you chang'd ?

Alice. Ay ! to my former happy life again ;
From title of an odious strumpet's name,
To honest Arden's wife, not Arden's honest
wife.

Ah, Mosbie ! 't is thou hast rifled me of that,
And made me slanderous to all my kin :

Even in my forehead is thy name engraven—
A mean artificer ;—that low-born name !

I was bewitch'd—wo-worth the hapless hour
And all the causes that enchanted me !

Mosbie. Nay, if thou ban, let me breathe
curses forth ;

And if you stand so nicely at your fame,

Let me repent the credit I have lost.

I have neglected matters of import

That would have stated me above thy state ;

Forslow'd advantages, and spurn'd at time ;

Ay, Fortune's right hand Mosbie hath for-
sook,

To take a wanton giglot by the left.

I left the marriage of an honest maid,

Whose dowry would have weigh'd down all
thy wealth,

Whose beauty and demeanour far exceeded
thee :

This certain good I lost for changing bad,

And wrapp'd my credit in thy company.

I was bewitch'd—thou is no theme of thine,

And thou, unhallow'd, hast enchanted me.

But I will break thy spells and exorcisms,

And put another sight upon these eyes,

That show'd my heart a raven for a dove.

Thou art not fair ; I view'd thee not till now :

Thou art not kind ; till now I knew thee not :

And now the rain hath beaten off thy guilt,

Thy worthless copper shows thee counterfeit.

It grieves me not to see how foul thou art,

But mads me that ever I thought thee fair.

Go, get thee gone, a copesmate for thy hinds ;

I am too good to be thy favourite.

Alice. Ay, now I see, and too soon find it
true,

Which often hath been told me by my friends,

That Mosbie loves me not but for my wealth,

Which, too incredulous, I ne'er believed.

Nay, hear me speak, Mosbie, a word or two :

I 'll bite my tongue if it speak bitterly.

Look on me, Mosbie, or else I 'll kill myself ;

Nothing shall hide me from thy stormy look.

If thou cry war, there is no peace for me ;

I will do penance for offending thee,

And burn this prayer-book, where I here use

The holy word that hath converted me.

See, Mosbie, I will tear away the leaves,

And all the leaves, and in this golden cover

Shall thy sweet phrases and thy letters dwell,

And thereon will I chiefly meditate,

And hold no other sect but such devotion.

Wilt thou not look ? Is all thy love o'erwhelm'd ?

Wilt thou not hear ? What malice stops thine
ears ?

Why speak'st thou not ? What silence ties thy
tongue ?

Thou hast been sighted as the eagle is,

And heard as quickly as the fearful hare,

And spoke as smoothly as an orator,

When I have bid thee hear, or see, or speak.

And art thou sensible in none of these ?

Weigh all my good turns with this little
fault,

And I deserve not Mosbie's muddy looks ;

A fence of trouble is not thicken'd still ;

Be clear again ; I 'll no more trouble thee.

Mosbie. O fie, no ; I am a base artificer ;

My wings are feather'd for a lowly flight ;

Mosbie, fie ! no, not for a thousand pound—

Make love to you—why 't is unpardonable—

We beggars must not breathe where gentles
are !

Alice. Sweet Mosbie is as gentle as a king,

And I too blind to judge him otherwise :

Flowers sometimes spring in fallow lands,

Weeds in gardens ; roses grow on thorns :

So, whatsoe'er my Mosbie's father was,

Himself is valued gentle by his worth.

Mosbie. Ah ! how you women can insinuate

And clear a trespass with your sweetest tongue!

I will forget this quarrel, gentle Alice,
Provided I'll be tempted so no more."

The man who wrote that scene was no ordinary judge of the waywardness and wickedness of the human heart. It would be difficult to say that Shakspeare at any time could have more naturally painted the fearful contest of a lingering virtue with an overwhelming passion.

We have seen the conspiracy to murder Arden on Rainhamdown. The devoted man again escapes by accident, and the 'Chronicle' thus briefly records the circumstance:—

"When Master Arden came to Rochester, his man, still fearing that Black Will would kill him with his master, pricked his horse of purpose and made him to halt, to the end he might protract the time, and tarry behind. His master asked him why his horse halted. He said, I know not. Well, quoth his master, when ye come at the smith here before (between Rochester and the hill-foot over against Chatham) remove his shoe, and search him, and then come after me. So Master Arden rode on: and ere he came at the place where Black Will lay in wait for him, there overtook him divers gentlemen of his acquaintance, who kept him company; so that Black Will missed here also of his purpose."

The dramatist shows us Greene and the two ruffians waiting for their prey, and the excuse of Michael to desert his master. Arden and Franklin are now upon the stage; and the dialogue which passes between them is a very remarkable example of the dramatic skill with which the principal characters are made to sustain an indifferent conversation, but which is still in harmony with the tone of thought that pervades the whole drama. Arden is unhappy in his domestic circumstances, and he eagerly listens to the tale of another's unhappiness. The perfect ease with which this conversation is managed appears to us a singular excellence, when we regard the early date of this tragedy:—

"*Frank.* Do you remember where my tale did cease?

Arden. Ay, where the gentleman did check his wife.

Frank. She being reprehended for the fact, Witness produc'd that took her with the deed, Her glove brought in which there she left behind,

And many other assured arguments,
Her husband ask'd her whether it were not so.

Arden. Her answer then? I wonder how she look'd,

Having forsworn it with such vehement oaths,
And at the instance so approv'd upon her.

Frank. First did she cast her eyes down to the earth,

Watching the drops that fell amain from thence;

Then softly draws she forth her handkercher,
And modestly she wipes her tear-stain'd face;
Then hemm'd she out, to clear her voice should seem,

And with a majesty address'd herself
To encounter all their accusations:—

Pardon me, Master Arden, I can no more;
This fighting at my heart makes short my wind.

Arden. Come, we are almost now at Rainhamdown:

Your pretty tale beguiles the weary way;
I would you were in case to tell it out."

This "fighting at the heart," of which Franklin complains, is an augury of ill. Black Will and Shakebag are lurking around them; but the "divers gentlemen" of Arden's acquaintance arrive. Lord Cheinie and his men interrupt the murderers' purpose. Arden and his friend agree to dine with the nobleman the next day. They reach Feversham in safety. The occurrences of the next day are thus told in the 'Chronicle':—

"After that Master Arden was come home, he sent (as he usually did) his man to Sheppy, to Sir Thomas Cheinie's, then lord warden of the Cinque Ports, about certain business, and at his coming away he had a letter delivered, sent by Sir Thomas Cheinie to his master. When he came home, his mistress took the letter and kept it, willing her man to tell his master that he had a letter delivered him by Sir Thomas Cheinie, and that he had lost it: adding, that he thought it best that his master should go the next morning to Sir Thomas, because he knew not the matter: he said he would, and therefore he willed his man to be stirring betimes. In this mean while, Black Will, and one George

Shakebag, his companion, were kept in a storehouse of Sir Anthony Ager's, at Preston, by Greene's appointment; and thither came Mrs. Arden to see him, bringing and sending him meat and drink many times. He, therefore, lurking there, and watching some opportunity for his purpose, was willed in any wise to be up early in the morning, to lie in wait for Master Arden in a certain broomclose betwixt Feversham and the ferry (which close he must needs pass), there to do his feat. Now Black Will stirred in the morning betimes, but missed the way, and tarried in a wrong place.

"Master Arden and his man coming on their way early in the morning towards Shornelan, where Sir Thomas Cheinie lay, as they were almost come to the broomclose, his man, always fearing that Black Will would kill him with his master, feigned that he had lost his purse. Why, said his master, thou foolish knave, couldst thou not look to thy purse, but lose it? What was in it? Three pounds, said he. Why, then, go thy ways back again, like a knave (said his master), and seek it, for being so early as it is there is no man stirring, and therefore thou mayst be sure to find it; and then come and overtake me at the ferry. But nevertheless, by reason that Black Will lost his way, Master Arden escaped yet once again. At that time Black Will yet thought that he should have been sure to have met him homewards; but whether that some of the lord warden's men accompanied him back to Feversham, or that being in doubt, for that it was late, to go through the broomclose, and therefore took another way, Black Will was disappointed then also."

The incident of the visit to Lord Cheinie is, as we have seen, differently managed by the dramatist. The escape of Arden on this occasion is very ingeniously contrived. A sudden mist renders it impossible for the ruffians to find their way. Black Will thus describes his misadventure:—

Mosbie. Black Will and Shakebag, what make you here?

What! is the deed done? is Arden dead?

Will. What could a blinded man perform in arms?

Saw you not how till now the sky was dark,
That neither horse nor man could be discern'd?
Yet did we hear their horses as they pass'd."

As Arden and Franklin return they are in-

tercepted by Read, a sailor, who accuses Arden of a gross injustice in depriving him of a piece of land. This incident is founded upon a statement of the chronicler, in accordance with the superstition of the times, that where the murdered body of Arden was first laid the grass did not grow for two years, and that of this very field he had wrongfully possessed himself:—

"Many strangers came in that mean time, beside the townsmen, to see the print of his body there on the ground in that field; which field he had, as some have reported, most cruelly taken from a woman that had been a widow to one Cooke, and after married to one Richard Read, a mariner, to the great hindrance of her and her husband, the said Read; for they had long enjoyed it by a lease, which they had of it for many years, not then expired; nevertheless he got it from them. For the which the said Read's wife not only exclaimed against him in shedding many a salt tear, but also cursed him most bitterly even to his face, wishing many a vengeance to light upon him, and that all the world might wonder on him."

There is surely great power in the following passage; and the denunciation of the sailor comes with a terrible solemnity after the manifold escapes to which we have been witness:—

Read. What! wilt thou do me wrong and threaten me too?

Nay, then, I'll tempt thee, Arden; do thy worst.

God! I beseech thee show some miracle

On thee or thine, in plaguing thee for this:

That plot of ground which thou detainest from me,—

I speak it in an agony of spirit,—

Be ruinous and fatal unto thee!

Either there be butcher'd by thy dearest friends,

Or else be brought for men to wonder at,

Or thou or thine miscarry in that place,

Or there run mad and end thy cursed days.

Frank. Fie, bitter knave! bridle thine envious tongue;

For curses are like arrows shot upright,

Which falling down light on the shooter's head.

Read. Light where they will, were I upon the sea,

As oft I have in many a bitter storm,

And saw a dreadful southern flaw at hand,
The pilot quaking at the doubtful storm,
And all the sailors praying on their knees,
Even in that fearful time would I fall down,
And ask of God, whate'er betide of me,
Vengeance on Arden, or some misevent,
To show the world what wrong the carle hath
done.

This charge I'll leave with my distressful wife;
My children shall be taught such prayers as
these;

And thus I go, but leave my curse with thee."

We have next a scene in which, by the device of Alice, Mosbie and Black Will fasten a pretended quarrel upon Arden and his friend; but Mosbie is wounded, and Black Will runs away. A reconciliation takes place through the subtilty of the wife. Arden invites Mosbie with other friends to supper, and the conspirators agree that their deed of wickedness shall be done that night. The Chronicler briefly tells the story:—

"They conveyed Black Will into Master Arden's house, putting him into a closet at the end of his parlour. Before this they had sent out of the house all the servants, those excepted which were privy to the devised murder. Then went Mosbie to the door, and there stood in a nightgown of silk girded about him, and this was betwixt six and seven of the clock at night Master Arden, having been at a neighbour's house of his, named Dumpkin, and having cleared certain reckonings betwixt them, came home, and, finding Mosbie standing at the door, asked him if it were supper-time? I think not (quoth Mosbie); it is not yet ready. Then let us go and play a game at the tables in the mean season, said Master Arden. And so they went straight into the parlour; and as they came by through the hall, his wife was walking there, and Master Arden said, How now, Mistress Alice? But she made small answer to him. In the mean time one chained the wicket-door of the entry. When they came into the parlour, Mosbie sat down on the bench, having his face toward the place where Black Will stood. Then Michael, Master Arden's man, stood at his master's back, holding a candle in his hand, to shadow Black Will, that Arden might by no means perceive him coming forth. In their play Mosbie said thus (which seemed to be the watchword for Black Will's coming forth), Now

may I take you, sir, if I will. Take me? quoth Master Arden; which way? With that Black Will stepped forth, and cast a towel about his neck, so to stop his breath and strangle him. Then Mosbie, having at his girdle a pressing-iron of fourteen pounds weight, struck him on the head with the same, so that he fell down and gave a great groan, insomuch that they thought he had been killed."

The tragedy follows, with very slight variation, the circumstances here detailed. The guests arrive; but Alice betrays the greatest inquietude: she gets rid of them one by one, imploring them to seek her husband, and in the mean while the body is removed. The dramatist appears here to have depended upon the terrible interest of the circumstances more than upon any force of expression in the characters. The discovery of the murder follows pretty closely the narrative of the Chronicler:—

"*Here enter the Mayor and the Watch.*

Alice. How now, master Mayor? have you brought my husband home?

Mayor. I saw him come into your house an hour ago.

Alice. You are deceived; it was a Londoner.

Mayor. Mistress Arden, know you not one that is call'd Black Will?

Alice. I know none such; what mean these questions?

Mayor. I have the council's warrant to apprehend him.

Alice. I am glad it is no worse. [*Aside.* Why, master Mayor, think you I harbour any such?

Mayor. We are informed that here he is; And therefore pardon us, for we must search.

Alice. Ay, search and spare you not, through every room:

Were my husband at home you would not offer this.

Here enter FRANKLIN.

Master Franklin, what mean you come so sad?

Frank. Arden thy husband, and my friend, is slain.

Alice. Ah! by whom? master Franklin, can you tell?

Frank. I know not, but behind the abbey There he lies murder'd, in most piteous case.

Mayor. But, master Franklin, are you sure 't is he?

Frank. I am too sure; would God I were deceiv'd!

Alice. Find out the murderers; let them be known.

Frank. Ay, so they shall: come you along with us.

Alice. Wherefore?

Frank. Know you this hand-towel and this knife?

Susan. Ah, Michael! through this thy negligence,

Thou hast betrayed and undone us all. [*Aside.*

Mich. I was so afraid, I knew not what I did;

I thought I had thrown them both into the well. [*Aside.*

Alice. It is the pig's blood we had to supper.

But wherefore stay you? find out the murderers.

Mayor. I fear me you'll prove one of them yourself.

Alice. I one of them? what mean such questions?

Frank. I fear me he was murder'd in this house,

And carried to the fields; for from that place, Backwards and forwards, may you see

The print of many feet within the snow;

And look about this chamber where we are,

And you shall find part of his guiltless blood,

For in his slip-shoe did I find some rushes,

Which argue he was murder'd in this room.

Mayor. Look in the place where he was wont to sit:

See, see, his blood; it is too manifest.

Alice. It is a cup of wine which Michael shed.

Mich. Ay, truly.

Frank. It is his blood, which, strumpet, thou hast shed;

But, if I live, thou and thy complices,

Which have conspired and wrought his death,

Shall rue it."

In a subsequent scene the unhappy woman makes confession:—

"*Mayor.* See, Mistress Arden, where your husband lies.

Confess this foul fault, and be penitent.

Alice. Arden, sweet husband, what shall I say?

The more I sound his name the more he bleeds.

This blood condemns me, and in gushing forth Speaks as it falls, and asks me why I did it.

Forgive me, Arden! I repent me now;

And would my death save thine, thou shouldst not die.

Rise up, sweet Arden, and enjoy thy love,

And frown not on me when we meet in heaven:

In heaven I love thee, though on earth I did not."

The concluding scene shows us the principal culprits condemned to die:—

"*Mayor.* Leave to accuse each other now, And listen to the sentence I shall give:

Bear Mosbie and his sister to London straight,

Where they in Smithfield must be executed:

Bear Mistress Arden unto Canterbury,

Where her sentence is, she must be burnt:

Michael and Bradshaw in Feversham

Must suffer death.

Alice. Let my death make amends for all my sin.

Mosbie. Fie upon women, this shall be my song."

After the play, Franklin, in a sort of epilogue, somewhat inartificially tells us that Shakebag was murdered in Southwark, and Black Will burnt at Flushing; that Greene was hanged at Osbridge, and the painter fled. Bradshaw, according to the 'Chronicle' and the dramatic representation, was an innocent person. The drama concludes with the following apologetical lines:—

"Gentlemen, we hope you'll pardon this naked tragedy,

Wherein no filed points are foisted in

To make it gracious to the ear or eye;

For simple truth is gracious enough,

And needs no other points of glozing stuff."

These lines appear to us as an indication that the author of 'Arden of Feversham,' whoever he might be, was aware that such a story did not call for the highest efforts of dramatic art. It was a "naked tragedy,"—"simple truth,"—requiring "no filed points" or "glozing stuff." To a very young man, whose principles of art were not formed, and who had scarcely any models before him, this tragic story might have ap-

peared not only easy to be dramatized, but a worthy subject for his first efforts. We have to consider, too, how familiar the fearful narrative must have been to the young Shakspeare. The name of his own mother was Arden; perhaps the Kentish Arden had some slight relationship with her family; but it is evident that the play originally bore the name of Arden of Feversham, as if it were to mark the distinction between that family and the Ardens of Wilmecote. The tale, too, was narrated at uncommon length in the 'Chronicle' with which Shakspeare was very early familiar. There is considerable inequality in the style of this play, but that inequality is not sufficient to lead us to believe that more than one hand was engaged in it. The dramatic management is always skilful; the interest never flags; the action steadily goes forward; there are no secondary plots; and the little comedy that we find is not thrust in to produce a laugh from a few barren spectators. The writer, we think, was familiar with London, which is not at all inconsistent with the belief that it belongs to the youth of Shakspeare. Still, the utter absence of external evidence must have left the matter exceedingly doubtful, even if the tragedy had possessed higher excellences than belong to it. It was never attributed

to Shakspeare by any of his contemporaries; and yet it must have been a popular play, for it was reprinted forty years after its publication. Without doubt there may have been some writer, of whose name and works we know nothing, to whom this play may have been assigned; but if it be improbable that Shakspeare had written it, it is equally improbable that any of the known dramatists who had attained a celebrity in 1592 should have written it. It has none of the characteristics of any one of them—their extravagance of language; their forced passion; their overloading of classical allusions; their monotonous versification. Its power mainly lies in its simplicity. The unhappy woman is the chief character in the drama; and it appears to us that the author especially exhibits in "Mistress Arden" that knowledge of the hidden springs of human guilt and weakness which is not to be found in the generalities of any of the early contemporaries of Shakspeare. Still we must be understood as not attempting to pronounce any decided opinion upon the question of authorship. We neither hold with the German critics, whose belief approaches credulity in this and other cases, nor with the English, who appear to consider, in most things, that scepticism and sound judgment are identical.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

A CHARGE which has been urged against Shakspeare, with singular complacency on the part of the accusers, is, that he did not invent his plots. A writer, who in these later days has thought that to disparage Shakspeare would be a commendable task, says, "If Shakspeare had little of what the world

calls learning, he had less of *invention*, so far as regards the fable of his plays. For every one of them he was, in some degree, indebted to a preceding piece."* The assertion that the most inventive of poets was without invention, "as far as regards the fable of his

* 'Life of Shakspeare,' in Lardner's Cyclopædia.

plays," is as absurd as to say that Scott did not invent the fable of 'Kenilworth,' because the sad tale of Amy Robsart is found in Mickle's beautiful ballad of 'Cumnor Hall.' The truth is, that no one can properly appreciate the extent as well as the subtilty of Shakspeare's invention—its absorbing and purifying power—who has not traced him to his sources. It will be our duty, in many cases, to direct especial attention to the material upon which Shakspeare worked, to show how the rough ore became, under his hands, pure and resplendent—converted into something above all price by the unapproachable skill of the artist. It is not the workman polishing the diamond, but converting by his wonderful alchymy, something of small value into the diamond. The student of Shakspeare will understand that we here more particularly allude to the great plays which are founded on previous imaginative works, such as 'Romeo and Juliet,' and 'Lear;' and not to those in which, like 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona,' a few incidents are borrowed from the romance-writers.

"But what shall we do?" said the barber in 'Don Quixote,' when, with the priest, the housekeeper, and the niece, he was engaged in making a bonfire of the knight's library—"what shall we do with these little books that remain?" "These," said the priest, "are probably not books of chivalry, but of poetry." And, opening one, he found it was the 'Diana' of George Montemayor, and said (believing all the rest of the same kind), "These do not deserve to be burnt like the rest, for they cannot do the mischief that those of chivalry have done: they are works of genius and fancy, and do nobody any hurt." Such was the criticism of Cervantes upon the 'Diana' of Montemayor. The romance was the most popular which had appeared in Spain since the days of 'Amadis de Gaul;'* and it was translated into English by Bartholomew Yong, and published in 1598. The story involves a perpetual confusion of modern manners and ancient mythology; and Ceres, Minerva, and Venus, as well as the saints, constitute the machinery. The one part which Shakspeare has borrowed,

or is supposed to have borrowed, is the story of the shepherdess Felismena, which is thus translated by Mr. Dunlop:—"The first part of the threats of Venus was speedily accomplished; and, my father having early followed my mother to the tomb, I was left an orphan. Henceforth I resided at the house of a distant relative; and, having attained my seventeenth year, became the victim of the offended goddess by falling in love with Don Felix, a young nobleman of the province in which I lived. The object of my affections felt a reciprocal passion; but his father, having learned the attachment which subsisted between us, sent his son to court, with a view to prevent our union. Soon after his departure I followed him in the disguise of a page, and discovered on the night of my arrival at the capital, by a serenade I heard him give, that Don Felix had already disposed of his affections. Without being recognised by him, I was admitted into his service, and was engaged by my former lover to conduct his correspondence with the mistress who, since our separation, had supplanted me in his heart."

This species of incident, it is truly observed by Steevens, and afterwards by Dunlop, is found in many of the ancient novels. In 'Twelfth Night,' where Shakspeare is supposed to have copied Bandello, the same adventure occurs; but in that delightful comedy, the lady to whom the page in disguise is sent falls in love with him. Such is the Story of Felismena. It is, however, clear that Shakspeare must have known this part of the romance of Montemayor, although the translation of Yong was not published till 1598; for the pretty dialogue between Julia and Lucetta, in the first act, where Julia upbraids her servant for bringing the letter of Proteus, corresponds, even to some turns of expression, with a similar description by Felismena of her love's history. We give a passage from the old translation by Bartholomew Yong, which will enable our readers to compare the romance-writer and the dramatist:—

"Yet to try if by giving her some occasion I might prevail, I said unto her—And is it so, Rosina, that Don Felix, without any regard to

* Dunlop's 'History of Fiction.'

mine honour, dares write unto me? These are things, mistress (said she demurely to me again), that are commonly incident to love, wherefore, I beseech you, pardon me; for, if I had thought to have angered you with it, I would have first pulled out the balls of mine eyes. How cold my heart was at that blow, God knows; yet did I dissemble the matter, and suffer myself to remain that night only with my desire, and with occasion of little sleep."—P. 55.

The writer in Lardner's Cyclopædia, whom we have already mentioned, says, "'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' (a very poor drama) is indebted for *many of its incidents* to two works—the 'Arcadia' of Sidney, and the 'Diana' of Montemayor." The single incident in Sidney's 'Arcadia' which bears the slightest resemblance to the story of 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' is where Pyrocles, one of the two heroes of the 'Arcadia,' is compelled to become the captain of a band of people called Helots, who had revolted from the Lacedæmonians; and this is supposed to have given origin to the thoroughly Italian incident of Valentine being compelled to become the captain of the outlaws. The English travellers in Italy, in the time of Shakspeare, were perfectly familiar with banditti, often headed by daring adventurers of good family. Fynes Moryson, who travelled between Rome and Naples in 1594, has described a band headed by "the nephew of the Cardinal Cajetano." We may, therefore, fairly leave the *uninventive* Shakspeare to have found his outlaws in other narratives than that of the 'Arcadia.' With regard to the 'Diana' of Montemayor, we have stated the entire amount of what the author of 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' is supposed to have borrowed from it.

Amongst the objections which Dr. Johnson, in the discharge of his critical office, appears to have thought it his duty to raise against every play of Shakspeare, he says, with regard to the plot of this play, "he places the emperor at Milan, and sends his young men to attend him, but never mentions him more." As the emperor had nothing whatever to do with the story of 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona,' it was quite unnecessary that Shakspeare should mention

him more; and the mention of him at all was only demanded by a poetical law, which Shakspeare well understood, by which the introduction of a few definite circumstances, either of time or place, is sought for, to take the conduct of a story, in ever so small a degree, out of the region of generalization, and, by so doing, invest it with some of the attributes of reality. The poetical value of this single line—

"Attends the emperor in his royal court"—

can only be felt by those who desire to attach precise images to the descriptions which poetry seeks to put before the mind, and, above all, to the incidents which dramatic poetry endeavours to group and embody. Had this line not occurred in the play before us, we should have had a very vague idea of the scenes which are here presented to us; and, as it is, the poet has left just such an amount of vagueness as is quite compatible with the free conduct of his plot. He is not here dramatizing history. He does not undertake to bring before us the fierce struggles for the real sovereignty of the Milanese between Francis I. and the Emperor Charles V., while Francesco Sforza, the Duke of Milan, held a precarious and disputed authority. He does not pretend to tell us of the dire calamities, the subtle intrigues, and the wonderful reverses which preceded the complete subjection of Italy to the conqueror at Pavia. He does not show us the unhappy condition of Milan, in 1529, when, according to Guicciardini, the poor people who could not buy provisions at the exorbitant prices demanded by the governor died in the streets,—when the greater number of the nobility fled from the city, and those who remained were miserably poor,—and when the most frequented places were overgrown with grass, nettles, and brambles. He gives us a peaceful period, when courtiers talked lively jests in the duke's saloons, and serenaded their mistresses in the duke's courts. This state of things might have existed during the short period between the treaty of Cambray, in 1529 (when Francis I. gave up all claims to Milan, and it became

* Act I. Scene III.

a fief of the empire under Charles V.), and the death of Francesco Sforza, in 1535; or it might have existed at an earlier period in the life of Sforza, when after the battle of Pavia, he was restored to the dukedom of Milan; or when, in 1525, he received a formal investiture of his dignity. All that Shakspeare attempted to define was *some* period when there was a Duke of Milan holding his authority in a greater or less degree under the emperor. That period might have been before the time of Francesco Sforza. It could not have been after it, because, upon the death of that prince, the contest for the sovereignty of the Milanese was renewed between Francis I. and Charles V., till, in 1540, Charles invested his son Philip (afterwards husband of Mary of England) with the title, and the separate honours of a Duke of Milan became merged in the imperial family.

The one historical fact, then, mentioned in this play, is that of the emperor holding his court at Milan, which was under the government of a duke, who was a vassal of the empire. Assuming that this fact prescribes a limit to the period of the action, we must necessarily place that period at least half a century before the date of the composition of this drama. Such a period may, or may not, have been in Shakspeare's mind. It was scarcely necessary for him to have defined the period for the purpose of making his play more intelligible to his audience. That was all the purpose he had to accomplish. He was not, as we have said before, teaching history, in which he had to aim at all the exactness that was compatible with the exercise of his dramatic art. He had here, as in many other cases, to tell a purely romantic story: and all that he had to provide for with reference to what is called costume, in the largest sense of that word, was, that he should not put his characters in any positions, nor conduct his story through any details, which should run counter to the actual knowledge, or even to the conventional opinions, of his audience. That this was the theory upon which he worked as an artist we have little doubt; and that he carried this theory even into wilful ana-

chronisms we are quite willing to believe. He saw, and we think correctly, that there was not less real impropriety in making the ancient Greeks speak English than in making the same Greeks describe the maiden "in shady cloister mew'd" by the modern name of a nun*. He had to translate the images of the Greeks, as well as their language, into forms of words that an uncritical English audience would apprehend. Keeping this principle in view, whenever we meet with a commentator lifting up his eyes in astonishment at the prodigious ignorance of Shakspeare, with regard to geography, and chronology, and a thousand other proprieties to which the empire of poetry has been subjected by the inroads of modern accuracy, we picture to ourselves a far different being from the rude workman which their pedantic demonstrations have figured as the *beau idéal* of the greatest of poets. We see the most skilful artist employing his materials in the precise mode in which he intended to employ them; displaying as much knowledge as he intended to display; and, after all, committing fewer positive blunders, and incurring fewer violations of accuracy, than any equally prolific poet before or after him. If we compare, for example, the violations of historical truth on the part of Shakspeare, who lived in an age when all history came dim and dreary before the popular eye, and on the part of Sir Walter Scott, who lived in an age when all history was reduced to a tabular exactness—if we compare the great dramatist and the great novelist in this one point alone, we shall find that the man who belongs to the age of accuracy is many degrees more inaccurate than the man who belongs to the age of fable. There is, in truth, a philosophical point of view in which we must seek for the solution of those contradictions of what is real and probable, which, in Shakspeare, his self-complacent critics are always delighted to refer to his ignorance. One of their greatest discoveries of his geographical ignorance is furnished in this play:—Proteus and his servant go to Milan by water. It is perfectly true that Verona is inland, and that even the river

* 'Midsummer Night's Dream.'

Adige, which waters Verona, does not take its course by Milan. Shakspeare, therefore, was most ignorant of geography! In Shakspeare's days countries were not so exactly mapped out as in our own, and therefore he may, from lack of knowledge, have made a boat sail from Verona, and have given Bohemia a seabord. But let it be borne in mind that, in numberless other instances, Shakspeare has displayed the most exact acquaintance with what we call geography—an acquaintance not only with the territorial boundaries and the physical features of particular countries, but with a thousand nice peculiarities connected with their government and customs, which nothing but the most diligent reading and inquiry could furnish. Is there not, therefore, another solution of the ship at Verona, and the seabord of Bohemia, than Shakspeare's ignorance? Might not his knowledge have been in subjection to what he required, or fancied he required, for the conduct of his dramatic incidents? Why does Scott make the murder of a Bishop of Liege, by William de la Marck, the great cause of the quarrel between Charles the Bold and Louis XI., to revenge which murder the combined forces of Burgundy and France stormed the city of Liege,—when, at the period of the insurrection of the Liegeois described in 'Quentin Durward,' no William de la Marck was upon the real scene, and the murder of a Bishop of Liege by him took place fourteen years afterwards? No one, we suppose, imputes this inaccuracy to historical ignorance in Scott. He was writing a romance, we say, and he therefore thought fit to sacrifice historical truth. The real question, in all these cases, to be asked, is, Has the writer of imagination gained by the violation of propriety a full equivalent for what he has lost? In the case of Shakspeare we are not to determine this question by a reference to the actual state of popular knowledge in our own time. What startles us as a violation of propriety was received by the audience of Shakspeare as a fact,—or, what was nearer the poet's mind, the fact was held by the audience to be in subjection to the fable which he sought to present;—the world of

reality lived in a larger world of art;—art divested the real of its formal shapes, and made its hard masses plastic. In our own days we have lost the power of surrendering our understanding, spell-bound, to the witchery of the dramatic poet. We cannot sit for two hours enchained to the one scene which equally represents Verona or Milan, Rome or London, and ask no aid to our senses beyond what the poet supplies us in his dialogue. We must now have changing scenes, which carry us to new localities; and pauses, to enable us to comprehend the time which has elapsed in the progress of the action; and appropriate dresses, that we may at once distinguish a king from a peasant, and a Roman from a Greek. None of these aids had our ancestors:—but they had what we have not—a thorough love of the dramatic art in its highest range, and an appreciation of its legitimate authority. Wherever the wand of the enchanter waved, there were they ready to come within his circle and to be mute. They did not ask, as we were long too accustomed to ask, for happy Lears and unmetaphysical Hamlets. They were content to weep scalding tears with the old king, when his "poor fool was hanged," and to speculate with the unresolving prince even to the extremest depths of his subtlety. They did not require tragedy to become a blustering melodrame, or comedy a pert farce. They could endure poetry and wit—they understood the alternations of movement and repose. We have, in our character of audience, become degraded even by our advance in many appliances of civilization with regard to which the audiences of Shakspeare were wholly ignorant. We know many small things exactly which they were content to leave unstudied; but we have lost the perception of many grand and beautiful things which they received instinctively and without effort. They had great artists working for them, who knew that the range of their art would carry them far beyond the hard, dry, literal copying of every-day Nature which we call Art; and they laid down their shreds and patches of accurate knowledge as a tribute to the conquerors who came to sub-

due them to the dominion of imagination. What cared they, then, if a ship set sail from Verona to Milan, when Valentine and his man ought to have departed in a carriage?—or what mattered it if Hamlet went “to school at Wittemberg,” when the real Hamlet was in being five centuries before the university of Wittemberg was founded? If Shakspeare had lived in this age, he might have looked more carefully into his maps and his encyclopædias. We might have gained something, but what should we not have lost?

“Shakspeare,” says Malone, “is fond of alluding to events occurring at the time when he wrote;”^{*} and Johnson observes that many passages in his works evidently show that “he often took advantage of the facts then recent, and the passions then in motion.”[†] This was a part of the *method* of Shakspeare, by which he fixed the attention of his audience. The Nurse, in ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ says, “It is now since the earthquake eleven years.” Dame Quickly, in ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor,’ talks of her “knights, and lords, and gentlemen, with their coaches, I warrant you, coach after coach.” Coaches came into general use about 1605. “Banks’s horse,” which was exhibited in London in 1589, is mentioned in ‘Love’s Labour’s Lost.’ These, amongst other instances which we shall have occasion to notice, are not to be regarded as determining the period of the dramatic action; and, indeed, they are, in many cases, decided anachronisms. In ‘The Two Gentlemen of Verona’ there are several very curious and interesting passages which have distinct reference to the times of Elizabeth, and which, if Milan had then been under a separate ducal government, would have warranted us in placing the action of this play about half a century later than we have done. As it is, the passages are remarkable examples of Shakspeare’s close attention to “facts then recent;” and they show us that the spirit of enterprise, and the intellectual activity, which distinguished the period when Shakspeare first began to write for the stage, found

a reflection in the allusions of this accurate observer.

The pursuits of the gallant spirits of the court of Elizabeth are reflected in several expressions of this comedy. The incidental notices of the general condition of the people are less decided; but a few passages that have reference to popular manners may be pointed out.

The boyhood of Shakspeare was passed in a country town where the practices of the Roman church had not been wholly eradicated either by severity or reason. We have one or two passing notices of these. Proteus, in the first scene, says,

“I will be thy beadsman, Valentine.”

Shakspeare had, doubtless, seen the rosary still worn, and the “beads bidden,” perhaps even in his own house. Julia compares the strength of her affection to the unwearied steps of “the true-devoted pilgrim.” Shakspeare had, perhaps, heard the tale of some ancient denizen of a ruined abbey, who had made the pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady at Loretto, or had even visited the sacred tomb at Jerusalem. Thurio and Proteus are to meet at “St. Gregory’s well.” This is the only instance in Shakspeare in which a holy well is mentioned; but how often must he have seen the country people, in the early summer morning, or after their daily labour, resorting to the fountain which had been hallowed from the Saxon times as under the guardian influence of some venerated saint! These wells were closed and neglected in London when Stow wrote; but at the beginning of the last century the custom of making journeys to them, according to Bourne, still existed amongst the people of the North; and he considers it to be “the remains of that superstitious practice of the Papists of paying adoration to wells and fountains.” This play contains several indications of the prevailing taste for music, and exhibits an audience proficient in its technical terms; for Shakspeare never addressed words to his hearers which they could not understand. This taste was a distinguishing characteristic of the age of Elizabeth; it was not extinct in that of the

^{*} Life, vol. ii. p. 331, edit. 1821.

[†] Note on ‘King John.’

first Charles; but it was lost amidst the puritanism of the Commonwealth and the profligacy of the Restoration. There is one allusion in this play to the games of the people—"bid the base,"—which shows us that the social sport which the school-boy and school-girl still enjoy,—that of prison-base, or prison-bars,—and which still makes the village green vocal with their mirth on some fine evening of spring, was a game of Shakspeare's days. In the long winter nights the farmer's hearth was made cheerful by the well-known ballads of Robin Hood; and to "Robin Hood's fat friar" Shakspeare makes his Italian outlaws allude. But with music, and sports, and ales, and old wives' stories, there was still much misery in the land. "The beggar" not only spake "puling" "at Hallowmas," but his importunities or his threats were heard at all seasons. The disease of the country was vagrancy; and to this deep-rooted evil there were only applied the surface remedies to which Launce alludes, "the stocks" and "the pillory." The whole nation was still in a state of transition from semi-barbarism to civilization; but the foundations of modern society had been laid. The labourers had ceased to be vassals; the middle class had been created; the power of the aristocracy had been humbled, and the nobles had clustered round the sovereign, having cast aside the low tastes which had belonged to their fierce condition of independent chieftains. This was a state in which literature might, without degradation, be adapted to the wants of the general people; and "the best public instructor" then was the drama. Shakspeare found the taste created; but it was for him, most especially, to purify and exalt it.

Without any reference to the period of the poet's life in which 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' was written, Theobald tells us, "This is one of Shakspeare's worst plays." Hanmer thinks Shakspeare "only enlivened it with some speeches and lines, thrown in here and there." Upton determines "that, if any proof can be drawn from manner and style, this play must be sent packing, and seek for its parent elsewhere." Johnson, though singularly favourable in his opinion

of this play, says of it, "There is a strange mixture of knowledge and ignorance, of care and negligence." Mrs. Lenox (who, in the best slip-slop manner, does not hesitate to pass judgment upon many of the greatest works of Shakspeare) says, "'T is generally allowed that the plot, conduct, manners, and incidents of this play are extremely deficient." On the other hand, Pope gives the style of this comedy the high praise of being "natural and unaffected;" although he complains that the familiar parts are "composed of the lowest and most trifling conceits, to be accounted for only by the gross taste of the age he lived in." Johnson says, "When I read this play, I cannot but think that I find, both in the serious and ludicrous scenes, the language and sentiments of Shakspeare. It is not, indeed, one of his most powerful effusions; it has neither many diversities of character, nor striking delineations of life. But it abounds in *γνῶμαι* (sententious observations) beyond most of his plays; and few have more lines or passages which, singly considered, are eminently beautiful." Coleridge, the best of critics on Shakspeare, has no remark on this play beyond calling it "a sketch." Hazlitt, in a more elaborate criticism, follows out the same idea: "This is little more than the first outlines of a comedy loosely sketched in. It is the story of a novel dramatised with very little labour or pretension; yet there are passages of high poetical spirit, and of inimitable quaintness of humour, which are undoubtedly Shakspeare's; and there is throughout the conduct of the fable a careless grace and felicity which marks it for his." We scarcely think that Coleridge and Hazlitt are correct in considering this play "a sketch," if it be taken as a whole. In the fifth act, unquestionably, the outlines are "loosely sketched in." The unusual shortness of that act would indicate that it is, in some degree, hurried and unfinished. If the text be correct which makes Valentine offer to give up Silvia to Proteus, there cannot be a doubt that the poet intended to have worked out this idea, and to have exhibited a struggle of self-denial, and a sacrifice to friendship, which very young persons are in-

clined to consider possible. Friendship has its romance as well as love. In the other parts of the comedy there is certainly extremely little that can be called sketchy. They appear to us to be very carefully finished. There may be a deficiency of power, but not of elaboration. A French writer who has analysed all Shakspeare's plays (M. Paul Duport) considers that this play possesses a powerful charm, which he attributes to the brilliant and poetical colouring of its style. He thinks, and justly, that a number of graceful comparisons, and of vivid and picturesque images, here take the place of the bold and natural conceptions (the "vital and organic" style, as Coleridge expresses it) which are the general characteristic of his genius. In these elegant generalizations M. Duport properly recognises the vagueness and indecision of the youthful poet*. The remarks of A. W. Schlegel on this comedy are acute, as usual:—"The Two Gentlemen of Verona" paints the irresolution of love, and its infidelity towards friendship, in a pleasant, but, in some degree, superficial manner; we might almost say with the levity of mind which a passion suddenly entertained, and as suddenly given up, presupposes. The faithless lover is at last forgiven without much difficulty by his first mistress, on account of his ambiguous repentance. For the more serious part, the premeditated flight of the daughter of a prince, the captivity of her father along with herself by a band of robbers, of which one of the two gentlemen, the faithful and banished friend, has been compulsively elected captain,—for all this a peaceful solution is soon found. It is as if the course of the world was obliged to accommodate itself to a transient youthful caprice, called love."† A writer, who has well studied Shakspeare, and has published a volume of very praiseworthy research‡, distinguished for correct taste and good feeling (although some of its theories may be reasonably doubted), considers this comedy Shakspeare's first dramatic production, and

* 'Essais Littéraires sur Shakspeare,' tome ii. p. 357. Paris, 1828.

† 'Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature,' Black's translation, vol. ii. p. 156.

‡ 'Shakspeare's Autobiographical Poems,' &c. By Charles Armitage Brown. 1838.

imagines that it might have been written at Stratford, and have formed his chief recommendation to the Blackfriars company. He adds,—“This play appears to me enriched with all the freshness of youth; with strong indications of his future matured poetical power and dramatic effect. It is the day-spring of genius, full of promise, beauty, and quietude, before the sun has arisen to its splendour. I can likewise discern in it his peculiar gradual development of character, his minute touches, each tending to complete a portrait; and if these are not executed by the master-hand, as shown in his later plays, they are by the same apprentice-hand, each touch of strength sufficient to harmonise with the whole.” Johnson says of this play, “I am inclined to believe that it was not very successful.” It is difficult to judge of the accuracy of this belief. The “quietude,” the “minute touches,” may not have been exactly suited to an audience who had as yet been unaccustomed to the delicate lights and shadows of the Elizabethan drama. Shakspeare, in some degree, stood in the same relation to his predecessors as Raffaele did to the earlier painters. The gentle gradations, the accurate distances, the harmony and repose, had to be superadded to the hard outlines, the strong colouring, and the disproportionate parts of the elder artists, in the one case as in the other. But our dramatist, who unquestionably always looked to what the *stage* demanded from him, however he may have looked beyond the mere wants of his present audience, put enough of attractive matter into ‘The Two Gentlemen of Verona’ to command its popularity. No “clown” that had appeared on the stage before his time could at all approach to Launce in real humour. But the clowns that the celebrated Tarleton represented had mere words of buffoonery put into their mouths; and it is not to be wondered at that Shakspeare retained some of their ribaldry. It would be some time before he would be strong enough to assert the rights of his own genius, as he unquestionably did in his later plays. He must, as a young writer, have been sometimes forced into a sacrifice to the popular requirements.

Mr. Boaden, as it is stated by Malone, is of opinion that 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' contains the germ of other plays which Shakspeare afterwards wrote*. The expression, "germ of other plays," is somewhat undefined. There are in this play the germ of several incidents and situations which occur in the poet's maturer works—the germ of some others of his most admired characters—the germ of one or two of his most beautiful descriptions. When Julia is deputed by Proteus to bear a letter to Silvia, urging the love which he ought to have kept sacred for herself, we are reminded of Viola, in 'Twelfth Night,' being sent to plead the Duke's passion for Olivia, although the other circumstances are widely different;—when we see Julia wearing her boy's disguise, with a modest archness and spirit, our thoughts involuntarily turn not only to Viola, but to Rosalind, and to Imogen, three of the most exquisite of Shakspeare's exquisite creations of female character;—when Valentine, in the forest of Mantua, exclaims,

"How use doth breed a habit in a man!
This shadowy desert, unfrequented woods,
I better brook than flourishing peopled towns,"

we hear the first faint notes of the same delicious train of thought, though greatly modified by the different circumstances of the speaker, that we find in the banished Duke of the forest of Ardennes:—

"Now, my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more
sweet
Than that of painted pomp?"

When Valentine exclaims,

"And why not death, rather than living torment?"

we recollect the grand passage in 'Macbeth,' where the same thought is exalted, and rendered terrible, by the peculiar circumstances of the speaker's guilt:—

"Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to
peace,

* Malone's Shakspeare, by Boswell, vol. ii. p. 32.

Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy."

There are, generally speaking, resemblances throughout the works of Shakspeare, which his genius alone could have preserved from being imitations. But, taking the particular instance before us, when with matured powers he came to deal with somewhat similar incidents and characters in other plays, and to repeat the leading idea of a particular sentiment, we can, without difficulty, perceive how vast a difference had been produced by a few years of reflection and experience;—how he had made to himself an entirely new school of art, whose practice was as superior to his own conceptions as embodied in his first works, as it was beyond the mastery of his contemporaries, or of any who have succeeded him. It was for this reason that Pope called the style of 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' "simple and unaffected." It was opposed to Shakspeare's later style, which is teeming with allusion upon allusion, dropped out of the exceeding riches of his glorious imagination. With the exception of the few obsolete words, and the unfamiliar application of words still in use, this comedy has, to our minds, a very modern air. The thoughts are natural and obvious, the images familiar and general. The most celebrated passages have a character of grace rather than of beauty; the elegance of a youthful poet aiming to be correct, instead of the splendour of the perfect artist, subjecting every crude and apparently unmanageable thought to the wonderful alchymy of his all-penetrating genius. Look, in this comedy, at the images, for example, which are derived from external nature, and compare them with the same class of images in the later plays. We might select several illustrations, but one will suffice:—

"As the most favour'd bud
Is eaten by the canker ere it blow;
Even so by love the young and tender wit
Is turn'd to folly; blasted in the bud,
Losing his verdure even in the prime."

Here the image is feeble, because it is ge-

neralized. But compare it with the same image in 'Romeo and Juliet':—

"But he, his own affection's counsellor,
Is to himself—I will not say how true,
But to himself so secret and so close,
So far from sounding and discovering,
As is the bud bit with an envious worm,
*Ere he can spread his sweet leaves to the air,
Or dedicate his beauty to the sun.*"

Johnson, as we have already seen, considered this comedy to be wanting in "diversity of character." The action, it must be observed, is mainly sustained by Proteus and Valentine, and by Julia and Silvia; and the conduct of the plot is relieved by the familiar scenes in which Speed and Launce appear. The other actors are very subordinate, and we scarcely demand any great diversity of character amongst them; but it seems to us, with regard to Proteus and Valentine, Julia and Silvia, Speed and Launce, that the characters are exhibited, as it were, in pairs, upon a principle of very defined though delicate contrast. We will endeavour to point out these somewhat nice distinctions.

Coleridge says, "It is Shakspeare's peculiar excellence, that, throughout the whole of his splendid picture-gallery (the reader will excuse the acknowledged inadequacy of this metaphor), we find individuality everywhere,—mere portrait nowhere. In all his various characters we still feel ourselves communing with the same nature, which is everywhere present as the vegetable sap in the branches, sprays, leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruits, their shapes, tastes, and odours. Speaking of the effect, that is, his works themselves, we may define the excellence of their method as consisting in that just proportion, that union and interpenetration of the universal and the particular, which must ever pervade all works of decided genius and true science."* Nothing can be more just and more happy than this definition of the distinctive quality of Shakspeare's works,—a quality which puts them so immeasurably above all other works,—"the union and interpenetration of the universal and the

particular." It constitutes the peculiar charm of his matured style,—it furnishes the key to the surpassing excellence of his representations, whether of facts which are cognizable by the understanding or by the senses, in which a single word individualizes the "particular" object described or alluded to, and, without separating it from the "universal," to which it belongs, gives it all the value of a vivid colour in a picture, perfectly distinct, but also completely harmonious. The skill which he attained in this wonderful mastery over the whole world of materials for poetical construction was the result of continued experiment. In his characters, especially, we see the gradual growth of this extraordinary power, as clearly as we perceive the differences between his early and his matured forms of expression. But it is evident to us, that, in his very earliest delineations of character, he had conceived the principle which was to be developed in "his splendid picture-gallery." In the comedy before us, Valentine and Proteus are the "two gentlemen"—Julia and Silvia the two ladies "beloved"—Speed and Launce the two "clownish" servants. And yet how different is the one from the other of the same class! Proteus, who is first presented to us as a lover, is evidently a very cold and calculating one. He is "a votary to fond desire;" but he *complains* of his mistress that she has metamorphosed him—

"Made me neglect my studies—lose my time."

He ventures, however, to write to Julia; and when he has her answer, "her oath for love, her honour's pawn," he immediately takes the most prudent view of their position:—

"Oh that our fathers would applaud our loves!"

But he has not decision enough to demand this approbation:—

"I fear'd to show my father Julia's letter,
Lest he should take exceptions to my love."

He parts with his mistress in a very formal and well-behaved style;—they exchange rings, but Julia has first offered "this remembrance" for her sake;—he makes a

* 'The Friend.' 3rd edit. 1837, vol. iii. p. 121.

commonplace vow of constancy, whilst Julia rushes away in tears ;—he quits Verona for Milan, and has a new love at first sight the instant he sees Silvia. The mode in which he sets about betraying his friend, and wooing his new mistress, is eminently characteristic of the calculating selfishness of his nature :—

“ If I can check my erring love, I will ;
If not, to compass her I ’ll use my skill.”

He is of that very numerous class of men who would always be virtuous, if virtue would accomplish their object as well as vice ;—who prefer truth to lying, when lying is unnecessary ;—and who have a law of justice in their own minds, which if they can observe they “ will ;” but “ if not,”—if they find themselves poor erring mortals, which they infallibly do,—they think

“ Their stars are more in fault than they.”

This Proteus is a very contemptible fellow, who finally exhibits himself as a ruffian and a coward, and is punished by the heaviest infliction that the generous Valentine could bestow—his forgiveness. Generous, indeed, and most confiding, is our Valentine—a perfect contrast to Proteus. In the first scene he laughs at the passion of Proteus ; as if he knew that it was alien to his nature ; but, when he has become enamoured himself, with what enthusiasm he proclaims his devotion !—

“ Why, man, she is mine own ;
And I as rich in having such a jewel
As twenty seas, if all their sand were pearl.”

In this passionate admiration we have the germ of Romeo, and so also in the scene where Valentine is banished :—

“ And why not death, rather than living torment ?”

But here is only a sketch of the strength of a deep and all-absorbing passion. The whole speech of Valentine upon his banishment is forcible and elegant ; but compare him with Romeo in the same condition :—

“ Heaven is here
Where Juliet lives ; and every cat, and dog,
And little mouse, every unworthy thing,

Live here in heaven, and may look on her,
But Romeo may not.”

We are not wandering from our purpose of contrasting Proteus and Valentine, by showing that the character of Valentine is compounded of some of the elements that we find in Romeo ; for the strong impulses of both these lovers are as much opposed as it is possible to the subtle devices of Proteus. The confiding Valentine goes to his banishment with the cold comfort that Proteus gives him :—

“ Hope is a lover’s staff ; walk hence with that.”

He is compelled to join the outlaws, but he makes conditions with them that exhibit the goodness of his nature ; and we hear no more of him till the catastrophe, when his traitorous friend is forgiven with the same confiding generosity that has governed all his intercourse with him. We have little doubt of the incorrect sense in which the passage is usually received, in which he is supposed to give up Silvia to his false friend—or, at any rate, of its unfinished nature. But it is perfectly natural and probable that he should receive Proteus again into his confidence, upon his declaration of “ hearty sorrow,” and that he should do so upon principle :—

“ Who by repentance is not satisfied,
Is nor of heaven, nor earth.”

It is, to our minds, quite delightful to find in this, which we consider amongst the earliest of Shakspeare’s plays, that exhibition of the real Christian spirit of charity which, more or less, pervades all his writings ; but which, more than any other quality, has made some persons, who deem their own morality as of a higher and purer order, cry out against them, as giving encouragement to evil doers. We shall have frequent occasion to speak of the noble lessons which Shakspeare teaches *dramatically* (and not according to the childish devices of those who would make the dramatist write a “ moral” at the end of five acts, upon the approved plan of a Fable in a spelling-book), and we therefore pass over, for the present, those profound critics who say “ he has no

moral purpose in view."* But there are some who are not quite so pedantically wise as to affirm "he paid no attention to that retributive justice which, when human affairs are rightly understood, pervades them all,"† but who yet think that Proteus ought to have been at least banished, or sent to the galleys for a few years with the outlaws; that Angelo, in 'Measure for Measure,' should have been hanged; that Leontes, in 'The Winter's Tale,' was not sufficiently punished for his cruel jealousy by sixteen years of sorrow and repentance;—that Iachimo, in 'Cymbeline,' is not treated with poetical justice when Posthumus says,—

"Kneel not to me:

The power that I have on you is to spare you;—

and that Prospero is a very weak magician not to apply his power to a better purpose than only to give his wicked brother and his followers a little passing punishment; weak indeed, when he has them in his hands, to exclaim,—

"Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,

Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury

Do I take part: the rarer action is

In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,

The sole drift of my purpose doth extend

Not a frown further: go release them, Ariel."

Not so thought Shakspeare. He, that never represented crime as virtue, had the largest pity for the criminal. "He has never varnished over wild and bloodthirsty passions with a pleasing exterior—never clothed crime and want of principle with a false show of greatness of soul:"‡ but, on the other hand, he has never made the criminal a monster, and led us to flatter ourselves that he is not a man. It is as a man, subject to the same infirmities as all are who are born of woman, that he represents Proteus, and Iachimo, and other of the lesser criminals, as receiving pardon upon repentance. It is not so much that they are de-

serving of pardon, but that it would be inconsistent with the characters of the pardoners that they should exercise their power with severity. Shakspeare lived in an age when the vindictive passions were too frequently let loose by men of all sects and opinions,—and much too frequently in the name of that religion which came to teach peace and good will. Is it to be objected to him, then, that wherever he could he asserted the supremacy of charity and mercy;—that he taught men the "quality" of that blessed principle which

"Droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven;"—

that he proclaimed—no doubt to the annoyance of all self-worshippers—that "the web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together;"—and that he asked of those who would be hard upon the wretched, "Use every man after his desert, and who shall 'scape whipping?" We may be permitted to believe that this large toleration had its influence in an age of racks and gibbets; and we know not how much of this charitable spirit may have come to the aid of the more authoritative and holier teaching of the same principle,—forgotten even by the teachers, but gradually finding its way into the heart of the multitude,—till human punishments at length were compelled to be subservient to other influences than those of the angry passions, and the laws could only dare to ask for justice, but not for vengeance.

The generous, confiding, courageous, and forgiving spirit of Valentine are well appreciated by the Duke—"Thou art a gentleman." In this praise are included all the virtues which Shakspeare desired to represent in the character of Valentine;—the absence of which virtues he has also indicated in the selfish Proteus. The Duke adds, "and well derived." "Thou art a gentleman," in "thy spirit"—a gentleman in "thy unrivalled merit;" and thou hast the honours of ancestry—the further advantage of honourable progenitors.

We have dwelt so long upon the contrasts in the characters of the "two gentlemen," Proteus and Valentine, that we may appear

* Lardner's Cyclopædia, 'Literary and Scientific Men,' vol. ii. p. 128.

† Ibid., vol. iii. p. 122.

‡ A. W. Schlegel, Black's trans., vol. ii. p. 137.

to have forgotten our purpose of also tracing the distinctive peculiarities of the two ladies "beloved." Julia, in the sweetest feminine tenderness, is entirely worthy of the poet of Juliet and Imogen. Amidst her deep and sustaining love she has all the playfulness that belongs to the true woman. When she receives the letter of Proteus, the struggle between her affected indifference and her real disposition to cherish a deep affection is exceedingly pretty. Then comes, and very quickly, the development of the change which real love works,—the plighting her troth with Proteus,—the sorrow for his absence,—the flight to him,—the grief for his perjury,—the forgiveness. How full of heart and gentleness is all her conduct after she has discovered the inconstancy of Proteus! How beautiful an absence is there of all upbraiding either of her faithless lover or of his new mistress! Of the one she says,

"Because I love him, I must pity him;"

the other she describes, without a touch of envy, as

"A virtuous gentlewoman, mild, and beautiful."

Silvia is a character of much less intensity of feeling. She plays with her accepted lover as with a toy given to her for her amusement; she delights in a contest of words between him and his rival Thurio; she avows she is betrothed to Valentine, when she reproves Proteus for his perfidy, but she allows Proteus to send for her picture, which is, at least, not the act of one who strongly felt and resented his treachery to his friend. When she resolves to escape from her prison, she does not go forth to danger and difficulty with the spirit of Julia,—*"a true-devoted pilgrim,"*—but she places herself under the protection of Eglamour (*"a very perfect gentle knight,"* as Chaucer would have called him)—

"For the ways are dangerous to pass."

She goes to her banished lover, but she flies from her father—

"To keep me from a most unholy match."

When she encounters Proteus in the forest,

she, indeed, spiritedly avows her love for Valentine and her hatred for himself; nor is there, in any of the slight distinctions which we have pointed out, any real inferiority in her character to that of Julia. She is only more under the influence of circumstances. Julia, by her decision, subdues the circumstances of her situation to her own will.

Turn we now to Speed and Launce, the two "clownish" servants of Valentine and Proteus.

In a note introducing the first scene between Speed and Proteus, Pope says, "This whole scene, like many others in these plays (some of which I believe were written by Shakspeare, and others interpolated by the players), is composed of the lowest and most trifling conceits, to be accounted for only by the gross taste of the age he lived in; *populo ut placerent*. I wish I had authority to leave them out." There are passages in Shakspeare which an editor would desire to leave out, if he consulted only the standard of taste in his own age; just as there are passages in Pope which we now consider filthy and corrupting, which the wits and fine ladies of the court of Anne only regarded as playful and piquant. The scenes, however, in which Speed and Launce are prominent,—with the exception of a few obscure allusions, which will not be discovered unless a commentator points them out, and of one piece of plain speaking in Launce, which is refinement itself when compared with the classical works of the Dean of St. Patrick's,—these scenes offer a remarkable instance of the reform which Shakspeare was enabled to effect in the conduct of the English stage, and which, without doubt, banished a great deal of what had been offensive to good manners, as well as good taste. The "clown" or "fool" of the earlier English drama was introduced into every piece. He came on between the acts and sometimes interrupted even the scenes by his buffoonery. Occasionally the author set down a few words for him to speak; but out of these he had to spin a monologue of doggrel verses created by his "extemporal wit." The 'Jeasts' of Richard Tarleton, the most celebrated of these clowns, were published in 1611; and

fortunate it must have been for the morals of our ancestors that Shakspeare constructed dialogue for his "Clowns," and insisted on their adhering to it: "Let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them." The "Clown" was the successor of the "Vice" of the old Moralities; and he was the representative of the domestic "Jester" that flourished before and during the age of Shakspeare. The "clownish" servant was something intermediate between the privileged "fool" of the old drama and the pert lackey of the later comedy. But he originally stood in the place of the genuine "Clown;" and his "conceits" are to be regarded partly as a reflection of the manners of the most refined, whose wit, in a great degree, consisted in a play upon words, and partly as a law of the established drama, which even Shakspeare could not dispense with, if he had desired so to do. But his instinctive knowledge of the value of his dramatic materials led him to retain the "Clowns" amongst other inheritances of the old stage; and who that has seen the use he has made of the "*allowed* fool" in 'Twelfth Night,' and 'As You Like It,' and 'All's Well that Ends Well,' and especially in 'Lear,'—of the country clown in 'Love's Labour's Lost' and 'The Merchant of Venice,'—and of the "clownish" or witty servant in 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona,' will regret that he did not cast away what Pope has called "low" and "trifling," determining to retain a machinery equally adapted to the relief of the tragic and the heightening of the comic, and entirely in keeping with what we now call the romantic drama,—an edifice of which Shakspeare found the scaffolding raised and the stone quarried, but which it was reserved for him alone to build up upon a plan in which the most apparently incongruous parts were subjected to the laws of fitness and proportion, and wherein even the grotesque (like the grinning heads in our fine Gothic cathedrals) was in harmony with the beautiful and the sublime.

Speed and Launce are both punsters; but Speed is by far the more inveterate one. He begins with a pun—my master "is shipp'd already, and I have play'd the sheep (ship) in losing him." The same play upon words which the ship originates runs through the scene; and we are by no means sure that, if Shakspeare made Verona a seaport in ignorance (which we very much doubt),—if, like his own Hotspur, he had "forgot the map,"—whether he would, at any time, have converted Valentine into a land-traveller, and have lost his pun upon a better knowledge. In the scene before us, Speed establishes his character for "a quick wit;" Launce, on the contrary, very soon earns the reputation of "a mad-cap" and "an ass." And yet Launce can pun as perseveringly as Speed. But he can do something more. He can throw in the most natural touches of humour amongst his quibbles; and, indeed, he altogether forgets his quibbles when he is indulging his own peculiar vein. That vein is unquestionably drollery,—as Hazlitt has well described it,—the richest farcical drollery. His descriptions of his leave-taking, while "the dog all this while sheds not a tear," and of the dog's misbehaviour when he thrust "himself into the company of three or four gentlemanlike dogs," are perfectly irresistible. We must leave thee, Launce; but we leave thee with less regret, for thou hast worthy successors. Thou wert among the first fruits, we think, of the creations of the greatest comic genius that the world has seen, and thou wilt endure for ever, with Bottom, and Malvolio, and Parolles, and Dogberry. Thou wert conceived, perhaps, under that humble roof at Stratford, to gaze upon which all nations have since sent forth their pilgrims! Or, perhaps, when the young poet was, for the first time, left alone in the solitude of London, he looked back upon that shelter of his boyhood, and shadowed out his own parting in thine, Launce!

CHAPTER II.

THE COMEDY OF ERRORS.

'The Comedy of Errors' was clearly one of Shakspeare's very early plays. It was probably untouched by its author after its first production. We have here no existing sketch to enable us to trace what he introduced, and what he corrected, in the maturity of his judgment. It was, we imagine, one of the pieces for which he would manifest little solicitude after his genius was fully developed. The play is amongst those mentioned by Meres in 1598. The only allusion in it which can be taken to fix a date is one which is supposed to refer to the civil contests of France upon the accession of Henry IV.

We must depend, then, upon the internal evidence of this being a very early play. This evidence consists,

1. In the great prevalence of that measure which was known to our language as early as the time of Chaucer by the name of "rime dogerel." This peculiarity is found only in three of our author's plays,—in 'Love's Labour's Lost,' in 'The Taming of the Shrew,' and in 'The Comedy of Errors.' But this measure was a distinguishing characteristic of the early English drama. It prevails very much more in this play than in 'Love's Labour's Lost:' for prose is here much more sparingly introduced. The doggerel seems to stand half-way between prose and verse, marking the distinction between the language of a work of art and that of ordinary life, in the same way that the recitative does in a musical composition. It is to be observed, too, in 'The Comedy of Errors,' that this measure is very carefully regulated by somewhat strict laws:—

"We came into the world like brother and brother,
And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another."

This concluding passage, which is cast in the same mould as the other similar verses of the play, is much more regular in its

structure than the following in 'Love's Labour's Lost:'—

"And such barren plants are set before us, that
we thankful should be,

Which we of taste and feeling are, for those
parts that do fructify in us more than he."

The latter line almost reminds us of 'Mrs. Harris's Petition,' which, according to Swift, "Humbly sheweth

"That I went to warm myself in Lady Betty's
chamber, because I was cold,

And I had in a purse seven pounds four shillings and sixpence, besides farthings, in money and gold."

The measure in 'The Comedy of Errors' was formed by Shakspeare upon his rude predecessors. In some of these it is not only occasionally introduced, but constitutes the great mass of the dialogue. In 'Gammer Gurton's Needle,' for example, the doggerel measure prevails throughout, as in the concluding lines:—

"But now, my good masters, since we must be
gone,

And leave you behind us, here all-alone,
Since at our lasting ending thus merry we be,
For Gammer Gurton's Needle's sake, let us
have a plaudytie."

The comedy of 'Ralph Roister Doister' is composed in the same measure. Nor was it in humorous performances alone that this structure of verse (which Shakspeare always uses as a vehicle of fun) was introduced. In 'Damon and Pithias,' a serious play, which was probably produced about 1570, the sentence of Dionysius is thus pronounced upon Pithias:—

"Pithias, seeing thou takest me at my word,
take Damon to thee:

For two months he is thine; unbind him; I
set him free;

Which time once expired, if he appear not
the next day by noon,

Without further delay thou shalt lose thy life,
and that full soon."

There cannot, we think, be a stronger proof that 'The Comedy of Errors' was an early play of our author, than its agreement, in this particular, with the models which Shakspeare found in his almost immediate predecessors.

2. In 'Love's Labour's Lost,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' and 'The Comedy of Errors,' alternate rhymes are very frequently introduced. Shakspeare obtained the mastery over this species of verse in the 'Venus and Adonis,' "the first heir of his invention," as he himself calls it. He writes it with extraordinary facility—with an ease and power that strikingly contrast with the more laboured elegiac stanzas of modern times. Nothing can be more harmonious, or the harmony more varied, than this measure in Shakspeare's hands. Take, for example, the well-known lines in the 'Venus and Adonis,' which, themselves the most perfect music, have been allied to one of the most successful musical compositions of the present day:—

"Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear,
Or, like a fairy, trip upon the green,
Or, like a nymph, with long dishevell'd hair,
Dance on the sands, and yet no footing
seen."

Compare these with the following in 'Love's Labour's Lost':—

"A wither'd hermit, five-score winters worn,
Might shake off fifty, looking in her eye:
Beauty doth varnish age, as if new born,
And gives the crutch the cradle's infancy."

Or with these, in 'Romeo and Juliet':—

"If I profane with my unworthiest hand
This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this,—
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand,
To smooth that rough touch with a tender
kiss."

Or with some of the lines in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' such as—

"Why should you think that I should woo in
scorn?
Scorn and derision never come in tears:
Look, when I vow, I weep; and vows so born,
In their nativity all truth appears."

Or, lastly, with the exquisite address of

Antipholus of Syracuse to Luciana, in the third act of 'The Comedy of Errors':—

"Teach me, dear creature, how to think and
speak;

Lay open to my earthy gross conceit,
Smother'd in errors, feeble, shallow, weak,
The folded meaning of your word's deceit."

There was clearly a time in Shakspeare's poetical life when he delighted in this species of versification; and, in many of the instances in which he has employed it in the dramas we have mentioned, the passages have somewhat of a fragmentary appearance, as if they were not originally cast in a dramatic mould, but were amongst those scattered thoughts of the young poet which had shaped themselves into verse, without a purpose beyond that of embodying his feeling of the beautiful and the harmonious. When the time arrived that he had fully dedicated himself to the great work of his life, he rarely ventured upon cultivating these offshoots of his early versification. The doggerel was entirely rejected; the alternate rhymes no longer tempted him by their music to introduce a measure which is scarcely akin with the dramatic spirit; the couplet was adopted more and more sparingly; and he finally adheres to the blank verse which he may almost be said to have created,—in his hands certainly the grandest as well as the sweetest form in which the highest thoughts were ever unfolded to listening humanity.

The commentators have puzzled themselves, after their usual fashion, with the evidence which this play undoubtedly presents of Shakspeare's ability to read Latin, and their dogged resolution to maintain the opinion that in an age of grammar-schools our poet never could have attained that common accomplishment. The speech of Ægeon, in the first scene,—

"A heavier task could not have been imposed
Than I to speak my griefs unspeakable,"—

is, they admit, an imitation of the

"Infandum, Regina, jubes renovare dolorem"
of Virgil.

"Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine,"

lish ideas, we are forcibly reminded how "rare Ben" dealt with the spirit of antiquity in such matters:—

"The tongues of carps, dormice, and camels' heels,
Boil'd in the spirit of sol, and dissolved pearl,
Apicius' diet 'gainst the epilepsy:
And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,
Headed with diamond and carbuncle.
My footboy shall eat pheasants, calver'd salmons,
Knots, godwits, lampreys: I myself will have
The beards of barbels served, instead of salads;
Oil'd mushrooms," &c.

Alchymist, Act II., Scene 1.

The second act in Plautus opens with the landing of Menæchmus Sosicles and Messenio at Epidamnum. The following is Warner's translation of the scene:—

Men. Surely, Messenio, I think seafarers never take so comfortable a joy in anything as, when they have been long tossed and turmoiled in the wide seas, they hap at last to ken land.

Mes. I'll be sworn, I should not be gladder to see a whole country of mine own than I have been at such a sight. But, I pray, wherefore are we now come to Epidamnum? must we needs go to see every town that we hear of?

Men. Till I find my brother, all towns are alike to me: I must try in all places.

Mes. Why then, let's even as long as we live seek your brother: six years now have we roamed about thus—Istria, Hispania, Massylia, Illyria, all the upper sea, all high Greece, all haven-towns in Italy. I think if we had sought a needle all this time we must needs have found it, had it been above ground. It cannot be that he is alive; and to seek a dead man thus among the living, what folly is it!

Men. Yea, could I but once find any man that could certainly inform me of his death, I were satisfied; otherwise I can never desist seeking: little knowest thou, Messenio, how near my heart it goes.

Mes. This is washing of a blackamoor. Faith, let's go home, unless ye mean we should write a story of our travel.

Men. Sirrah, no more of these saucy speeches. I perceive I must teach you how to serve me, not to rule me.

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a servant. Well, I must speak my conscience. Do ye hear, sir? Faith I must tell you one thing: when I look into the lean estate of your purse, and consider advisedly of your decaying stock, I hold it very needful to be drawing homeward, lest in looking your brother we quite lose ourselves. For this assure yourself, this town, Epidamnum, is a place of outrageous expenses, exceeding in all riot and lasciviousness; and, I hear, as full of ribalds, parasites, drunkards, catchpoles, coney-catchers, and sycophants, as it can hold. Then for courtezans, why here's the currentest stamp of them in the world. You must not think here to scape with as light cost as in other places. The very name shows the nature; no man comes hither *sine damno*.

Men. You say very well indeed: give me my purse into mine own keeping, because I will so be the safer, *sine damno*."

Steevens considered that the description of Ephesus in 'The Comedy of Errors,'—

"They say this town is full of cozenage," &c.—

was derived from Warner's translation, where "ribalds, parasites, drunkards, catchpoles, coney-catchers, sycophants, and courtezans," are found; the *voluptarii*, *potatores*, *sycophantæ*, *palpatores*, and *meretrices* of Plautus. But surely the "jugglers," "sorcerers," "witches," of Shakspeare are not these. With his exquisite judgment, he gave Ephesus more characteristic "liberties of sin." The cook of the courtesan in Plautus first mistakes the wandering brother for the profligate of Epidamnum. Erotium next encounters him, and with *her* he dines; and, leaving her, takes charge of a cloak, which the Menæchmus of Epidamnum had given her. In 'The Comedy of Errors' the stranger brother dines with the wife of him of Ephesus. The Parasite next meets with the wanderer, and, being enraged that the dinner is finished in his absence, resolves to disclose the infidelities of Menæchmus to his jealous wife. The "errors" proceed, in the maid of Erotium bringing him a chain which she says he had stolen from his wife: he is to cause it to be made heavier and of a newer fashion. The traveller goes his way with the cloak and the chain. The jealous wife and the Parasite lie in wait for the faithless husband, who, the Parasite reports, is carrying the cloak to

much more distinctly than the translation, which we present with it:—

[PLAUTUS.]

“Mercator Siculus, cui erant gemini filii;
Ei, surrepto altero, mors obtigit.
Nomen surreptitii illi indit qui domi est
Avus paternus, facit Menæchmum Sosiclem.
Et is germanum, postquam adolevit, quæritat
Circum omnes oras. Post Epidamnum de-
venit:
Hic fuerat auctus ille surreptitius.
Menæchmum civem credunt omnes advenam:
Eumque appellant, meretrix, uxor et socer.
Ii se cognoscunt fratres postremò invicem.”

[WARNER.]

“Two twinborn sons a Sicill merchant had,
Menechmus one, and Sosicles the other:
The first his father lost a little lad,
The grandsire named the latter like his
brother.
This (grown a man) long travel took to seek
His brother, and to Epidamnum came,
Where th’ other dwelt enrich’d, and him so
like,
That citizens there take him for the same:
Father, wife, neighbours, each mistaking
either,
Much pleasant error, ere they meet together.”

This argument is almost sufficient to point out the difference between the plots of Plautus and of Shakspeare. It stands in the place of the beautiful narrative of Ægeon, in the first scene of ‘The Comedy of Errors.’ In Plautus we have no broken-hearted father bereft of both his sons: he is dead; and the grandfather changes the name of the one child who remains to him. Shakspeare does not stop to tell us how the twin-brothers bear the same name; nor does he explain the matter any more in the case of the Dromios, whose introduction upon the scene is his own creation. In Plautus, the brother, Menæchmus Sosicles, who remained with the grandsire, comes to Epidamnum in search of his twin-brother who was stolen, and he is accompanied by his servant Messenio; but all the perplexities that are so naturally occasioned by the confusion of the two twin-servants are entirely wanting. The mistakes are carried on by the “meretrix, uxor, et

socer” (softened by Warner into “father, wife, neighbours”). We have “Medicus,” the prototype of Dr. Pinch; but the mother of the twins is not found in Plautus. We scarcely need say that the Parasite and the Father-in-law have no place in Shakspeare’s comedy. The scene in ‘The Comedy of Errors’ is changed from Epidamnum to Ephesus; but we have mention of Epidamnum once or twice in the play.

‘The Menæchmi’ opens with the favourite character of the Roman comedy—the Parasite; the scene is at Epidamnum. The Parasite is going to dine with Menæchmus, who comes out from his house, upbraiding his jealous wife. But his wife is not jealous without provocation:—

“Hanc modo uxori intus palam surripui; ad scortum fero.”

The Antipholus of Shakspeare does not propose to dine with one “pretty and wild,” and to bestow “the chain” upon his hostess, till he has been provoked by having his own doors shut upon him. Our poet has thus preserved some sympathy for his Antipholus, which the Menæchmus of Plautus forfeits upon his first entrance. Menæchmus and the Parasite go to dine with Erotium (meretrix). Those who talk of Shakspeare’s anachronisms have never pointed out to us what formidable liberties the translators of Shakspeare’s time did not scruple to take with their originals. Menæchmus gives very precise directions for his dinner, after the most approved Roman fashion:—

“Jube igitur nobis tribus apud te prandium accurarier,
Atque aliquid scitamentorum de foro obsonarier,
Glandionidem suillam, laridum pernonidem, aut
Sinciput, aut polimenta porcina, aut aliquid ad eum modum.”

This passage W. W. thus interprets:—“Let a good dinner be made for us three. Hark ye, some oysters, a mary-bone pie or two, some artichokes, and potato-roots; let our other dishes be as you please.” In reading this bald attempt to transfuse the Roman luxuries into words accommodated to Eng-

lish ideas, we are forcibly reminded how "rare Ben" dealt with the spirit of antiquity in such matters :—

"The tongues of carps, dormice, and camels' heels,
Boil'd in the spirit of sol, and dissolved pearl,
Apicius' diet 'gainst the epilepsy:
And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,
Headed with diamond and carbuncle.
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"They say this town is full of cozenage," &c.—

was derived from Warner's translation, where "ribalds, parasites, drunkards, catchpoles, coney-catchers, sycophants, and courtezans," are found; the *voluptarii*, *potatores*, *sycophantæ*, *palpatores*, and *meretrices* of Plautus. But surely the "jugglers," "sorcerers," "witches," of Shakspeare are not these. With his exquisite judgment, he gave Ephesus more characteristic "liberties of sin." The cook of the courtezan in Plautus first mistakes the wandering brother for the profligate of Epidamnum. Erotium next encounters him, and with *her* he dines; and, leaving her, takes charge of a cloak, which the Menæchmus of Epidamnum had given her. In 'The Comedy of Errors' the stranger brother dines with the wife of him of Ephesus. The Parasite next meets with the wanderer, and, being enraged that the dinner is finished in his absence, resolves to disclose the infidelities of Menæchmus to his jealous wife. The "errors" proceed, in the maid of Erotium bringing him a chain which she says he had stolen from his wife: he is to cause it to be made heavier and of a newer fashion. The traveller goes his way with the cloak and the chain. The jealous wife and the Parasite lie in wait for the faithless husband, who, the Parasite reports, is carrying the cloak to

the dyer's; and they fall with their reproaches upon the Menæchmus of Epidamnum, who left the courtesan to attend to his business. A scene of violence ensues; and the bewildered man repairs to Erotium for his dinner. He meets with reproaches only; for he knows nothing of the cloak and the chain. The stranger Menæchmus, who has the cloak and chain, encounters the wife of his brother, and of course he utterly denies any knowledge of her. Her father comes to her assistance, upon her hastily sending for him. He first reproaches his daughter for her suspicions of her husband, and her shrewish temper: Luciana reasons in a somewhat similar way with Adriana, in 'The Comedy of Errors';—and the Abbess is more earnest in her condemnation of the complaining wife. The scene in Plautus wants all the elevation that we find in Shakspeare; and the old man seems to think that the wife has little to grieve for, as long as she has food, clothes, and servants. Menæchmus, the traveller, of course cannot comprehend all this; and the father and daughter agree that he is mad, and send for a doctor. He escapes from the discipline which is preparing for him; and the doctor's assistants lay hold of Menæchmus, the citizen. He is rescued by Messenio, the servant of the traveller, who mistakes him for his master, and begs his freedom. The servant, going to his inn, meets with his real master; and, while disputing with him, the Menæchmus of Epidamnum joins them. Of course, the *éclaircissement* is the natural consequence of the presence of both upon the same scene. The brothers resolve to leave Epidamnum together; the citizen making proclamation that he will sell all his goods, and adding, with his accustomed loose notions of conjugal duty,

"Venibit uxor quoque etiam, si quis emptor venerit."

Hazlitt has said, "This comedy is taken *very much* from 'The Menæchmi' of Plautus, and is not an improvement on it." We think he is wrong in both assertions.

We have noticed some of the anachronisms which the translator of Plautus, in Shak-

spere's time, did not hesitate to introduce into his performance. W. W. did not do this ignorantly; for he was a learned person; and, we are told in an address of 'The Printer to his Readers,' had "divers of this poet's comedies Englished, for the use and delight of his private friends, who in Plautus' own words are not able to understand them." There was, no doubt, a complete agreement as to the principle of such anachronisms in the writers of Shakspeare's day. They employed the conventional ideas of their own time, instead of those which properly belonged to the date of their story; they translated images as well as words; they were addressing uncritical readers and spectators, and they thought it necessary to make themselves intelligible by speaking of familiar instead of recondite things. Thus W. W. not only gives us mary-bone pies and potatoes, instead of the complicated messes of the Roman sensualist, but he talks of constables and toll-gatherers, Bedlam fools and claret. In Douce's 'Essay on the Anachronisms and some other Incongruities of Shakspeare,' the offences of our poet in 'The Comedy of Errors' are thus summed up:—"In the *ancient* city of Ephesus we have ducats, marks, and guilders, and the *Abbess of a Nunnery*. Mention is also made of several modern European kingdoms and of America; of Henry the Fourth of France*, of Turkish tapestry, a rapier, and a striking clock; of Lapland sorcerers, Satan, and even of Adam and Noah. In one place Antipholus calls himself a *Christian*. As we are unacquainted with the immediate source whence this play was derived, it is impossible to ascertain whether Shakspeare is responsible for these anachronisms." The ducats, marks, guilders, tapestry, rapier, striking-clock, and Lapland sorcerers belong precisely to the same class of anachronisms as those we have already exhibited from the pen of the translator of Plautus. Had Shakspeare used the names of Grecian or Roman coins, his audience would not have understood him. Such matters have nothing whatever to do with the period of a dramatic action. But we

* Mention is certainly *not* made of Henry IV.; there is a supposed allusion to him.

think Douce was somewhat hasty in proclaiming that the *Abbess of a Nunnery*, *Satan*, *Adam and Noah*, and *Christian* were anachronisms, in connexion with the "ancient city of Ephesus."

Douce, seeing that 'The Comedy of Errors' was suggested by 'The Menæchmi' of Plautus, considers, no doubt, that Shakspeare intended to place his action at the same period as the Roman play. It is manifest to us that he intended precisely the contrary. 'The Menæchmi' contains invocations in great number to the ancient divinities;—Jupiter and Apollo are here familiar words. From the first line of 'The Comedy of Errors' to the last we have not the slightest allusion to the classical mythology. Was there not a time, then, even in the *ancient city of Ephesus*, when there might be an Abbess—men might call themselves Christians—and Satan, Adam, and Noah might be names of common use? We do not mean to affirm that Shakspeare intended to select the Ephesus of Christianity—the great city of churches and councils—for the dwelling-place of Antipholus, any more than we think that Duke Solinus was a real personage—that "Duke Menaphon, his most renowned uncle," ever had any existence—or that even his name could be found in any story more trustworthy than that of Greene's 'Arcadia.' The truth is, that, in the same way that *Ardennes* was a sort of *terra incognita* of chivalry, the poets of Shakspeare's time had no hesitation in placing the fables of the romantic ages in classical localities, leaving the periods and the names perfectly undefined and unappreciable. Who will undertake to fix a period for the action of Sir Philip Sidney's great romance, when the author has conveyed his reader into the fairy or pastoral land, and informed him "what manner of life the inhabitants of that region lead?" We cannot open a page of Sidney's 'Arcadia' without being struck with what we are accustomed to call anachronisms,—and these from a very severe critic, who, in his 'Defence of Poesy,' denounces with merciless severity all violation of the unities of the drama. One example will suffice:—Histor and Damon sing a "double sestina." The classical spirit that

pervades the following lines belongs to the "true Arcadian" age:—

"O Mercury, foregoer to the evening,
O heavenly huntress of the savage mountains,
O lovely star entitled of the morning,
While that my voice doth fill these woful
valleys,
Vouchsafe your silent ears to plaining music,
Which oft hath echo tired in secret forests."

But to what period belongs the following lines of the 'Phaleuciads,' which Zelmene sings, whose voice "strains the canary-birds?"—

"Her cannons be her eyes, mine eyes the walls
be,
Which at first volley gave too open entry,
Nor rampier did abide; my brain was up-
blown,
Undermined with a speech, the piercer of
thoughts."

Warton has prettily said, speaking of Spencer, "*exactness* in his poem would have been like the cornice which a painter introduced in the grotto of Calypso." Those who would define everything in poetry are the makers of corniced grottos. As we are not desirous of belonging to this somewhat obsolete fraternity, to which even Warton himself affected to belong when he wrote what is truly an apology for 'The Fairy Queen,' we will leave our readers to decide—whether Duke Solinus reigned at Ephesus before "the great temple, after having risen with increasing splendour from seven repeated misfortunes, was finally burnt by the Goths in their third naval invasion;"* or whether he presided over the decaying city, somewhat nearer to the period when Justinian "filled Constantinople with its statues, and raised his church of St. Sophia on its columns;"† or, lastly, whether he approached the period of its final desolation, when the "candlestick was removed out of its place," and the Christian Ephesus became the Mohammedan Aiasaluck.

But, decide as our readers may—and if they decide not at all they will not derive less satisfaction from the perusal of this drama—it has become necessary for the de-

* Gibbon, chap. x.

† Chandler.

mands of the modern theatre that the scenery and costume should belong to some definite period. This desire for exactness is, to a certain extent, an evil; and it is an evil which necessarily belongs to what, at first appearance, is a manifest improvement in the modern stage. The exceeding beauty and accuracy of scenery and dress in our days is destructive, in some degree, to the *poetical* truth of Shakspeare's dramas. It takes them out of the region of the broad and universal, to impair their freedom and narrow their range by a topographical and chronological minuteness. When the word "Thebes"* was exhibited upon a painted board to Shakspeare's audience, their thoughts of that city were in subjection to the descriptions of the poet; but, if a pencil as magical as that of Stanfield had shown them a Thebes that the child might believe to be a reality, the words to which they listened would have been comparatively uninteresting, in the easier gratification of the senses instead of the intellect. Poetry must always have something of the vague and indistinct in its character. The exact has its own province. Let science explore the wilds of Africa, and map out for us where there are mighty rivers and verdant plains, in the places where the old geographers gave us pictures of lions and elephants to designate undiscovered desolation. But let poetry still have its undefined countries; let Arcadia remain unsurveyed; let us not be too curious to inquire whether Dromio was an ancient heathen or a Christian, nor whether Bottom the weaver lived precisely at the time when Theseus did battle with the Centaurs.

Coleridge has furnished the philosophy of all just criticism upon 'The Comedy of Errors' in a note, which we shall copy entire from his 'Literary Remains':—

"The myriad-minded man, our, and all men's Shakspeare, has in this piece presented us with a legitimate farce in exactest consonance with the philosophical principles and character of farce, as distinguished from comedy and from entertainments. A proper farce is mainly distinguished from comedy by the licence allowed, and even required, in

the fable, in order to produce strange and laughable situations. The story need not be probable, it is enough that it is possible. A comedy would scarcely allow even the two Antipholuses; because, although there have been instances of almost indistinguishable likeness in two persons, yet these are mere individual accidents, *casus ludentis naturæ*, and the *verum* will not excuse the *inverisimile*. But farce dares add the two Dromios, and is justified in so doing by the laws of its end and constitution. In a word, farces commence in a postulate, which must be granted."

This postulate granted, it is impossible to imagine any dramatic action to be managed with more skill than that of 'The Comedy of Errors.' Hazlitt has pronounced a censure upon the play which is in reality a commendation:—"The curiosity excited is certainly very considerable, though not of the most pleasing kind. We are teased as with a riddle, which, notwithstanding, we try to solve." To excite the curiosity, by presenting a riddle which we should try to solve, was precisely what Plautus and Shakspeare intended to do. Our poet has made the riddle more complex by the introduction of the two Dromios, and has therefore increased the excitement of our curiosity. But whether this excitement be pleasing or annoying, and whether the riddle amuse or tease us, entirely depends upon the degree of attention which the reader or spectator of the farce is disposed to bestow upon it. Hazlitt adds, "In reading the play, from the sameness of the names of the two Antipholuses and the two Dromios, as well as from their being constantly taken for each other by those who see them, it is difficult, without a painful effort of attention, to keep the characters distinct in the mind. And again, on the stage, either the complete similarity of their persons and dress must produce the same perplexity whenever they first enter, or the identity of appearance which the story supposes will be destroyed. We still, however, having a clue to the difficulty, can tell which is which, merely from the contradictions which arise as soon as the different parties begin to speak; and we are

* See Sydney's 'Defence of Poesy.'

indemnified for the perplexity and blunders into which we are thrown, by seeing others thrown into greater and almost inextricable ones." Hazlitt has here, almost undesignedly, pointed out the source of the pleasure which, with an "effort of attention,"—not a "painful effort," we think,—a reader or spectator of 'The Comedy of Errors' is sure to receive from this drama. We have "a clue to the difficulty;"—we know more than the actors in the drama;—we may be a little perplexed, but the deep perplexity of the characters is a constantly increasing triumph to us. We have never seen the play; but one who has seen it thus describes the effect: "Until I saw it on the stage (not mangled into an opera), I had not imagined the extent of the mistakes, the drollery of them, their unabated continuance, till, at the end of the fourth act, they reached their climax with the assistance of Dr. Pinch, when the audience in their laughter rolled about like waves."* Mr. Brown adds, with great truth, "To the strange contrast of grave astonishment among the actors, with their laughable situations in the eyes of the spectators, who are let into the secret, is to be ascribed the irresistible effect." The spectators, the readers, have the clue, are let into the secret, by the story of the first scene. Nothing can be more beautifully managed, or is altogether more Shakspearean, than the narrative of *Ægeon*: and that narrative is so clear and so impressive, that the reader never forgets it amidst all the errors and perplexities which follow. The Duke, who, like the reader or spectator, has heard the narrative, instantly sees the real state of things when the *dénouement* is approaching:—

"Why, here begins his morning story right."

The reader or spectator has seen it all along,—certainly by an effort of attention, for without the effort the characters would be confounded like the vain shadows of a half-waking dream;—and, having seen it, it is impossible, we think, that the constant readiness of the reader or spectator to solve the riddle should be other than pleasurable. It

appears to us that every one of an *audience* of 'The Comedy of Errors,' who keeps his eyes open, will, after he has become a little familiar with the persons of the two *Antipholuses* and the two *Dromios*, find out some clue by which he can detect a difference between each, even without "the practical contradictions which arise as soon as the different parties begin to speak." Schlegel says, "In such pieces we must always presuppose, to give an appearance of truth to the senses at least, that the parts by which the misunderstandings are occasioned are played with masks: and this the poet, no doubt, observed." Whether masks, properly so called, were used in Shakspeare's time in the representation of this play, we have some doubt. But, unquestionably, each pair of persons selected to play the twins must be of the same height,—with such general resemblances of the features as may be made to appear identical by the colour and false hair of the tiring-room,—and be dressed with apparently perfect similarity. But let every care be taken to make the deception perfect, and yet the observing spectator will detect a difference between each; some peculiarity of the voice, some "trick o' the eye," some dissimilarity in gait, some minute variation in dress. We once knew two adult twin-brothers who might have played the *Dromios* without the least aids from the arts of the theatre. They were each stout, their stature was the same, each had a sort of shuffle in his walk, the voice of each was rough and unmusical, and they each dressed without any manifest peculiarity. One of them had long been a resident in the country town where we lived within a few doors of him, and saw him daily; the other came from a distant county to stay with our neighbour. Great was the perplexity. It was perfectly impossible to distinguish between them, at first, when they were apart; and we well remember walking some distance with the stranger, mistaking him for his brother, and not discovering the mistake (which he humoured) till we saw his total ignorance of the locality. But after seeing this *Dromio erraticus* a few times the perplexity was at an end. There was a difference which was

* 'Shakspeare's Autobiographical Poems,' &c. By Charles Armitage Brown.

palpable, though not exactly to be defined. If the features were alike, their expression was somewhat varied; if their figures were the same, the one was somewhat more erect than the other; if their voices were similar, the one had a different mode of accentuation from the other; if they each wore a blue coat with brass buttons, the one was decidedly more slovenly than the other in his general appearance. If we had known them at all intimately, we probably should have ceased to think that the outward points of identity were even greater than the points of difference. We should have, moreover, learned the difference of their characters. It appears to us, then, that as this farce of real life was very soon at an end when we had become a little familiar with the peculiarities in the persons of those twin brothers, so the spectator of 'The Comedy of Errors' will very soon detect the differences of the Dromios and Antipholuses; and that, while his curiosity is kept alive by the effort of attention which is necessary for this detection, the riddle will not only not tease him, but its perpetual solution will afford him the utmost satisfaction.

But has not Shakspeare himself furnished a clue to the understanding of the Errors, by his marvellous skill in the delineation of character? Pope forcibly remarked that, if our poet's dramas were printed without the names of the persons represented being attached to the individual speeches, we should know who is speaking by his wonderful discrimination in assigning to every character appropriate modes of thought and expression. It appears to us that this is unquestionably the case with the characters of each of the twin-brothers in 'The Comedy of Errors.'

The Dromio of Syracuse is described by his master as

"A trusty villain, sir; that very oft,
When I am dull with care and melancholy,
Lightens my humour with his merry jests."

But the wandering Antipholus herein describes himself: he is a prey to "care and melancholy." He has a holy purpose to

execute, which he has for years pursued without success:—

"He that commends me to mine own content
Commends me to the thing I cannot get.
I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop."

Sedate, gentle, loving, the Antipholus of Syracuse is one of Shakspeare's amiable creations. He beats his slave according to the custom of slave-beating; but he laughs with him and is kind to him almost at the same moment. He is an enthusiast, for he falls in love with Luciana in the midst of his perplexities, and his lips utter some of the most exquisite poetry:—

"Oh, train me not, sweet mermaid, with thy note,
To drown me in thy sister flood of tears;
Sing, syren, for thyself, and I will dote:
Spread o'er the silver waves thy golden
hairs."

But he is accustomed to habits of self-command, and he resolves to tear himself away even from the syren:—

"But, lest myself be guilty to self-wrong,
I'll stop mine ears against the mermaid's
song."

As his perplexities increase, he ceases to be angry with his slave:—

"The fellow is distract, and so am I;
And here we wander in illusions:
Some blessed power deliver us from hence!"

Unlike the Menæchmus Soscicles of Plautus he refuses to dine with the courtesan. He is firm yet courageous when assaulted by the Merchant. When the Errors are clearing up, he modestly adverts to his love for Luciana; and we feel that he will be happy.

Antipholus of Ephesus is decidedly inferior to his brother in the quality of his intellect and the tone of his morals. He is scarcely justified in calling his wife "shrewish." Her fault is a too sensitive affection for him. Her feelings are most beautifully described in that address to her supposed husband:—

"Come, I will fasten on this sleeve of thine:
Thou art an elm, my husband, I a vine;
Whose weakness, married to thy stronger
state,
Makes me with thy strength to communicate:

If aught possess thee from me, it is dross,
Usurping ivy, briar, or idle moss."

The classical image of the elm and the vine would have been sufficient to express the feelings of a fond and confiding woman; the exquisite addition of the

"Usurping ivy, briar, or idle moss,"

conveys the prevailing uneasiness of a loving and doubting wife. Antipholus of Ephesus has somewhat hard measure dealt to him throughout the progress of the Errors;—but he deserves it. His doors are shut against him, it is true;—in his impatience he would force his way into his house, against the remonstrances of the good Balthazar:—

"Your long experience of her wisdom,
Her sober virtue, years, and modesty,
Plead on her part some cause to you unknown."

He departs, but not "in patience;"—he is content to dine from home, but not at "the Tiger." His resolve—

"That chain will I bestow
(Be it for nothing but to spite my wife)
Upon mine hostess"—

would not have been made by his brother in a similar situation. He has spited his wife; he has dined with the courtesan. But he is not satisfied:—

"Go thou
And buy a rope's end; that will I bestow
Among my wife and her confederates."

We pity him not when he is arrested, nor when he receives the "rope's end" instead of his "ducats." His furious passion with his wife, and the foul names he bestows on her, are quite in character; and when he has

"Beaten the maids a-row, and bound the doctor," we cannot have a suspicion that the doctor was practising on the wrong patient. In a word, we cannot doubt that, although the Antipholus of Ephesus may be a brave soldier, who took "deep scars" to save his prince's life,—and that he really has a right to consider himself much injured,—he is strikingly opposed to the Antipholus of Syracuse; that he is neither sedate, nor

gentle, nor truly-loving;—that he has no habits of self-command;—that his temperament is sensual;—and that, although the riddle of his perplexity is solved, he will still find causes of unhappiness, and entertain

"a huge infectious troop
Of pale distemperatures."

The characters of the two Dromios are not so distinctly marked in their points of difference, at the first aspect. They each have their "merry jests;" they each bear a beating with wonderful good temper; they each cling faithfully to their master's interests. But there is certainly a marked difference in the quality of their mirth. The Dromio of Ephesus is precise and antithetical, striving to utter his jests with infinite gravity and discretion, and approaching a pun with a sly solemnity that is prodigiously diverting:—

"The capon burns, the pig falls from the spit;
The clock hath stricken twelve upon the bell;
My mistress made it one upon my cheek:
She is so hot, because the meat is cold."

Again:—

"I have some marks of yours upon my pate,
Some of my mistress' marks upon my shoulders,
But not a thousand marks between you both."

He is a formal humorist, and, we have no doubt, spoke with a drawling and monotonous accent, fit for his part in such a dialogue as this:—

"*Ant. E.* Were not my doors lock'd up, and I shut out?

Dro. E. Perdy, your doors were lock'd, and you shut out.

Ant. E. And did not she herself revile me there?

Dro. E. Sans fable, she herself reviled you there.

Ant. E. Did not her kitchen-maid rail, taunt, and scorn me?

Dro. E. Certes, she did; the kitchen-vestal scorn'd you."

On the contrary, the "merry jests" of Dromio of Syracuse all come from the outpouring of his gladsome heart. He is a creature of prodigious animal spirits, running over

with fun and queer similitudes. He makes not the slightest attempt at arranging a joke, but utters what comes uppermost with irrepressible volubility. He is an untutored wit, and, we have no doubt, gave his tongue such active exercise, by hurried pronunciation and variable emphasis, as could alone make his long descriptions endurable by his sensitive master. Look at the dialogue in the second scene of Act II., where Antipholus, after having repressed his jests, is drawn into a tilting-match of words with him, in which the merry slave has clearly the victory. Look, again, at his description of the "kitchen-wench,"—coarse, indeed, in parts, but altogether irresistibly droll. The twin-brother was quite incapable of such a flood of fun.

Again, what a prodigality of wit is displayed in his description of the bailiff! His epithets are inexhaustible. Each of the Dromios is admirable in his way: but we think that he of Syracuse is as superior to the twin-slave of Ephesus as our old friend Launce is to Speed, in 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona.' These distinctions between the Antipholuses and Dromios have not, as far as we know, been before pointed out;—but they certainly do exist, and appear to us to be defined by the great master of character with singular force as well as delicacy. Of course the characters of the twins could not be violently contrasted, for that would have destroyed the illusion. They must still

"Go hand in hand, not one before another."

CHAPTER III.

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST*.

THIS play was one of those published in Shakspeare's lifetime. The first edition appeared in 1598, under the following title: 'A pleasant conceited Comedie, called Loues Labors Lost. As it was presented before her Highnes this last Christmas. Newly corrected and augmented by W. Shakespere.'

We have seen, from the title of the first edition of 'Love's Labour's Lost,' that, when it was presented before Queen Elizabeth, at the Christmas of 1597, it had been "newly corrected and augmented." As no edition of the comedy, before it was corrected and augmented, is known to exist (though, as in the case of the unique 'Hamlet' of 1603,

one may some day be discovered), we have no proof that the few allusions to temporary circumstances, which are supposed in some degree to fix the date of the play, may not apply to the augmented copy only. Thus, when Moth refers to "the dancing horse" who was to teach Armado how to reckon what "deuce-ace amounts to," the fact that Banks's horse first appeared in London in 1589 does not prove that the original play might not have been written before 1589. This date gives it an earlier appearance than Malone would assign to it, who first settled it as 1591, and afterwards as 1594. A supposed allusion to 'The Metamorphosis of Ajax,' by Sir John Harrington, printed in 1596, is equally unimportant with reference to the original composition of the play. The "finished representation of colloquial excellence,"* in the beginning of the fifth act, is supposed to be an imitation of a passage in Sidney's 'Arcadia,' first printed in 1590. The passage might have been introduced in the augmented copy; to say nothing of the fact that the 'Arcadia' was known in manu-

* *Love's Labour's Lost.* The title of this play stands as follows in the folio of 1623: '*Loues Labour's Lost.*' The modes in which the genitive case and the contraction of *is* after a substantive are printed in the titles of other plays in this edition, and in some of the earlier copies, lead us to believe that the author intended to call his play 'Love's Labour is Lost.' The apostrophe is not given as the mark of the genitive case in these instances—'*The Winters Tale,*'—'*A Midsummer Nights Dream*'—(so printed). But, when the verb *is* forms a part of the title, the apostrophe is introduced, as in '*All's Well that Ends Well.*' We do not think ourselves justified, therefore, in printing either 'Love's Labour Lost,' or 'Love's Labours Lost,'—as some have recommended.

* Johnson.

script before it was printed. Lastly, the mask in the fifth act, where the King and his lords appear in Russian habits, and the allusions to Muscovites, which this mask produces, are supposed by Warburton to have been suggested by the public concern for the settlement of a treaty of commerce with Russia in 1591. But the learned commentator overlooks a passage in Hall's 'Chronicle,' which shows that a mask of Muscovites was a court recreation in the time of Henry VIII.

In the *extrinsic* evidence, therefore, which this comedy supplies, there is nothing whatever to disprove the belief which we entertain that, before it had been "corrected and augmented," 'Love's Labour's Lost' was one of the plays produced by Shakspeare about 1589, when, being only twenty-five years of age, he was a joint-proprietor of the Blackfriars theatre. The *intrinsic* evidence appears to us entirely to support this opinion; and, as this evidence involves several curious particulars of literary history, we have to request the reader's indulgence whilst we examine it somewhat in detail.

Coleridge, who always speaks of this comedy as a "juvenile drama"—"a young author's first work,"—says, "The characters in this play are either impersonated out of Shakspeare's own multiformity by imaginative self-position, or out of such as a country town and a schoolboy's observation might supply."* For this production, Shakspeare, it is presumed, found neither characters nor plot in any previous romance or drama. "I have not hitherto discovered," says Steevens, "any novel on which this comedy appears to have been founded: and yet the story of it has most of the features of an ancient romance." Steevens might have more correctly said, that the story has most of the features which would be derived from an acquaintance with the ancient romances. The action of the comedy, and the higher actors, are the creations of one who was imbued with the romantic spirit of the middle ages—who was conversant "with their Courts of Love, and all that lighter drapery of chivalry, which engaged even mighty kings with a sort of

serio-comic interest, and may well be supposed to have occupied more completely the smaller princes."† Our poet himself, in this play, alludes to the Spanish romances of chivalry:—

"This child of fancy, that Armado hight,
For interim to our studies, shall relate,
In high-born words, the worth of many a knight
From tawny Spain, lost in the world's debate."

With these materials, and out of his own "imaginative self-position," might Shakspeare have readily produced the King and Princess, the lords and ladies, of this comedy; and he might have caught the tone of the court of Elizabeth,—the wit, the play upon words, the forced attempts to say and do clever things,—without any actual contact with the society which was accessible to him after his fame conferred distinction even upon the highest and most accomplished patron. The more ludicrous characters of the drama were unquestionably within the range of "a school-boy's observation."

And first, of Don Armado, whom Scott calls "the Euphuist."‡ The historical events which are interwoven with the plot of Scott's 'Monastery' must have happened about 1562 or 1563, before the authority of the unhappy Queen of Scots was openly trodden under foot by Murray and her rebellious lords; and she had at least the personal liberty, if not the free will, of a supreme ruler. Our great novelist is, as is well known, not very exact in the matter of dates; and in the present instance his licence is somewhat extravagant. Explaining the source of the affectations of his Euphuist, Sir Piercie Shafton, he says—"it was about this period that 'the only rare poet of his time, the witty, comical, facetiously-quick, and quickly-facetious John Lyly—he that sate at Apollo's table, and to whom Phœbus gave a wreath of his own bays without snatching'§—he, in short, who wrote that singularly coxcombical work

* 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 102.

† 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 104.

‡ Introduction to 'The Monastery.'

§ Extract from Blount, the editor of six of Lyly's plays, in 1632.

called '*Euphues and his England*'—was in the very zenith of his absurdity and reputation. The quaint, forced, and unnatural style which he introduced by his '*Anatomy of Wit*' had a fashion as rapid as it was momentary;—all the court ladies were his scholars, and to *parler Euphuisme* was as necessary a qualification to a courtly gallant as those of understanding how to use his rapier, or to dance a measure.* This statement is somewhat calculated to mislead the student of our literary history as to the period of the commencement, and of the duration, of Lyly's influence upon the structure of "polite conversation." '*Euphues*,—the *Anatomy of Wit*,' was first published in 1580; and '*Euphues and his England*' in 1581—some eighteen or twenty years after the time when Sir Piercie Shafton (the English Catholic who surrendered himself to the champions of John Knox and the Reformation) explained to Mary of Avenel the merits of '*The Anatomy of Wit*'—"that all-to-be-unparalleled volume—that quintessence of human wit—that treasury of quaint invention—that exquisitely-pleasant-to-read and inevitably-necessary-to-be-remembered manual of all that is worthy to be known."† Nor was the fashion of Euphuism as momentary as Scott represents it to have been. The prevalence of this "spurious and unnatural mode of conversation"‡ is alluded to in Jonson's '*Every man out of his Humour*,' first acted in 1599;—and it forms one of the chief objects of the satire of rare Ben's '*Cynthia's Revels*,' first acted in 1600. But the most important question with reference to Shakspeare's employment of the affected phraseology which he puts into the mouth of Armado is, whether this "quaint, forced, and unnatural style" was an imitation of that said to be *introduced* by Lyly; if, indeed, Lyly did more than reduce to a system those innovations of language which had obtained a currency amongst us for some time previous to the appearance of his books. Blount, it is true, says—"Our nation are in his debt for a new English which he taught them.

'*Euphues and his England*' began first that language." It is somewhat difficult precisely to define what "that language" is; but the language of Armado is not very different from that of Andrew Borde, the physician, who, according to Hearne, "gave rise to the name of Merry Andrew, the fool of the mountebank stage." His '*Breviary of Health*,' first printed in 1547, begins thus: "Egregious doctours and maysters of the eximious and archane science of physicke, of your urbanitie exasperate not your selve."§ Nor is Armado's language far removed from the example of "dark words and ink-horn terms" exhibited by Wilson, in his '*Arte of Rhetorique*,' first printed in 1553, where he gives a letter thus devised by a Lincolnshire man for a void benefice:—"Ponderying, expending, and revolutyng with myself, your ingent affabilitie, and ingenious capacitie for mundane affaires, I cannot but celebrate and extoll your magnificall dexteritie above all other. For how could you have adapted suche illustrate prerogative, and dominicall superioritie, if the fecunditie of your ingenie had not been so fertile and wonderfull pregnant?"|| In truth, Armado the braggart, and Holofernes the pedant, both talk in this vein; though the schoolmaster may lean more to the hard words of Lexiphanism, and the fantastic traveller to the quips and cranks of Euphuism. Our belief is, that, although Shakspeare might have been familiar with Lyly's '*Euphues*' when he wrote '*Love's Labour's Lost*,' he did not, in Armado, point at the fashion of the court "to parley Euphuism."¶ The courtiers in this comedy, be it observed, speak, when they are wearing an artificial character, something approaching to this language, but not the identical language. They, indeed, "trust to speeches penn'd"—they "woo in rhyme"—they employ

"Taffeta phrases, silken terms precise,
Three-pil'd hyperboles;"—

they exhibit a "constant striving after logical precision, and subtle opposition of thoughts,

§ Quoted in Warton's '*History of English Poetry*,' vol. iii. p. 355: 1824.

|| Ibid., vol. iv. p. 160.

¶ Blount.

* '*Monastery*,' chap. xiv.

† Ibid.

‡ Gifford's '*Works of Ben Jonson*,' vol. ii. p. 250.

together with the making the most of every conception or image, by expressing it under the least expected property belonging to it."* But of no one of them can it be said, "He speaks not like a man of God's making." Ben Jonson, on the contrary, when, in 'Cynthia's Revels,' he satirized "the special fountain of manners, the court," expressly makes the courtiers talk the very jargon of Euphuism; as for example: "You know I call madam Philautia my Honour; and she calls me her Ambition. Now, when I meet her in the presence anon, I will come to her, and say, Sweet Honour, I have hitherto contented my sense with the lilies of your hand, but now I will taste the roses of your lips; and withal kiss her: to which she cannot but blushing answer, Nay, now you are too ambitious. And then do I reply, I cannot be too ambitious of Honour, sweet lady." But Armado,

"A refined traveller of Spain;

A man in all the world's new fashion planted,
That hath a mint of phrases in his brain,"

is the only man of "fire-new words." The pedant even laughs at him as a "fanatical phantasm." But such a man Shakspeare might have seen in his own country-town: where, unquestionably, the schoolmaster and the curate might also have flourished. If he had found them in books, Wilson's 'Rhetorike' might as well have supplied the notion of Armado and Holofernes, as Lyly's 'Euphues' of the one, or Florio's 'First Fruits' of the other.

Warburton, in his usual "discourse peremptory," tells us, "by Holofernes is designed a particular character, a pedant and schoolmaster of our author's time, one John Florio, a teacher of the Italian tongue in London, who has given us a small Dictionary of that language under the title of 'A World of Words.'" What Warburton asserted Farmer upheld. Florio, says Farmer, had given the first affront, by saying, "the plays that they play in England are neither right comedies nor right tragedies, but representations of histories without any decorum." Florio says this in his 'Second Fruits,' pub-

lished in 1591. Now, if Shakspeare felt himself aggrieved at this statement, which was true enough of the English drama before his time, he was betrayed by his desire for revenge into very unusual inconsistencies. For, in truth, the making of a teacher of Italian the prototype of a country schoolmaster, who, whilst he lards his phrases with words of Latin, as if he were construing with his class, holds to the good old English pronunciation, and abhors "such rackers of orthography as to speak *dout*, fine, when he should say *doubt*," &c., is such an absurdity as Shakspeare, who understood his art, would never have yielded to through any instigation of caprice or passion. The probability is, that, when Shakspeare drew Holofernes, whose name he found in Rabelais*, he felt himself under considerable obligations to John Florio for having given the world "his First Fruits; which yeelde familiar speech, merie proverbes, wittie sentences, and golden sayings." This book was printed in 1578. But, according to Warburton, Florio, in 1598, in the preface to a new edition of his 'World of Words,' is furious upon Shakspeare in the following passage: "There is another sort of leering curs, that rather snarl than bite, whereof I could instance in one, who, lighting on a good sonnet of a gentleman's, a friend of mine, that loved better to be a poet than to be counted so, called the author a rhymer. Let Aristophanes and his comedians make plays, and scour their mouths on Socrates, those very mouths they make to vilify shall be the means to amplify his virtue." Warburton maintains that the sonnet was Florio's own, and that it was parodied in the "extemporal epitaph on the death of the deer," beginning "The praiseful princess pierced and prick'd a pretty pleasing pricket."

This is very ingenious argument, but somewhat bold; and it appears to us that Thomas Wilson was just as likely to have suggested the alliteration as John Florio. In 'The Arte of Rhetorike,' which we have already quoted, we find this sentence: "Some use over-muche repetition of one letter, as

* "De fait, l'on luy enseigna ung grand docteur sophiste, nommé maistre Thubal Holoferne." Gargantua, livre i. chap. xiv.

* Coleridge's 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 104.

pitifull povertie prayeth for a penie, but puffed presumption passeth not a point." Indeed, there are many existing proofs of the excessive prevalence of alliteration in the end of the sixteenth century. Bishop Andrews is notorious for it. Florio seems to have been somewhat of a braggart, for he always signs his name "Resolute John Florio." But, according to the testimony of Sir William Cornwallis, he was far above the character of a fantastical pedant. Speaking of his translation of Montaigne (the book which has now acquired such interest by bearing Shakspeare's undoubted autograph), Sir William Cornwallis says, "Divers of his (Montaigne's) pieces I have seen translated; they that understand both languages say very well done; and, I am able to say (if you will take the word of ignorance), translated into a style admitting as few idle words as our language will endure."* Holofernes, the pedant, who had "lived long on the alms-basket of words"—who had "been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps,"—was not the man to deserve the praise of writing "a style admitting as few idle words as our language will endure."

As far then as we have been able to trace, the original comedy of 'Love's Labour's Lost' might have been produced by Shakspeare without any personal knowledge of the court language of Euphuism,—without any acquaintance with John Florio,—and with a design only to ridicule those extravagances which were opposed to the maxim of Roger Ascham, the most unpedantic of schoolmasters, "to speak as the common people do, to think as wise men do."† The further intrinsic evidence that this comedy was a very early production is most satisfactory. Coleridge has a very acute remark (which in our minds is worth all that has been written about the learning of Shakspeare) as to his early literary habits:—"It is not unimportant to notice how strong a presumption the diction and allusions of this play afford, that, though Shakspeare's acquirements in the dead languages might not be such as we suppose in a learned education, his habits had, nevertheless, been scholastic, and those

of a student. For a young author's first work almost always bespeaks his recent pursuits, and his first observations of life are either drawn from the immediate employments of his youth, and from the characters and images most deeply impressed on his mind in the situations in which those employments had placed him;—or else they are fixed on such objects and occurrences in the world as are easily connected with, and seem to bear upon, his studies and the hitherto exclusive subjects of his meditations." The frequent rhymes,—the alternate verses,—the familiar metre which has been called doggrel (but which Anstey and Moore have made classical by wit, and by fun even more agreeable than wit)—lines such as

"His face's own margent did quote such amazes,
That all eyes saw his eyes enchanted with
gazes;"—

the sonnets full of quaint conceits, or running off into the most playful anacreontics,—the skilful management of the pedantry, with a knowledge far beyond the pedantry,—and the happy employment of the ancient mythology,—all justify Coleridge's belief that the materials of this comedy were drawn from the immediate employments of Shakspeare's youth. Still the play, when augmented and corrected, might have received many touches derived from the power which he had acquired by experience. If it were not presumptuous to attempt to put our finger upon such passages, we would say that Biron's eloquent speech at the end of the fourth act, beginning

"Have at you then, affection's men at arms,"—and Rosaline's amended speech at the end of the play,

"Oft have I heard of you, my lord Biron,"—must be amongst the more important of these augmentations.

CHARLES LAMB was wont to call 'Love's Labour's Lost' the Comedy of Leisure. It is certain that, in the commonwealth of King Ferdinand of Navarre, we have—

"All men idle, all;
And women too."

* Essays. 1600.

† 'Toxophilus.

The courtiers, in their pursuit of "that angel knowledge," waste their time in subtle contentions how that angel is to be won;—the ladies from France spread their pavilions in the sunny park, and there keep up their round of jokes with their "wit's peddler," Boyet, "the nice;"—Armado listens to his page while he warbles 'Concolinel';—Jaquenetta, though she is "allowed for the dey," seems to have no dairy to look after;—Costard acts as if he were neither ploughman nor swineherd, and born for no other work than to laugh for ever at Moth, and, in the excess of his love for that "pathetical nit," to exclaim, "An I had but one penny in the world, thou shouldst have it to buy gingerbread;"—the schoolmaster appears to be without scholars, the curate without a cure, the constable without watch and ward. There is, indeed, one parenthesis of real business connected with the progress of the action—the difference between France and Navarre, in the matter of Aquitain. But the settlement of this business is deferred till "to-morrow"—the "packet of specialties" is not come; and whether Aquitain goes back to France, or the hundred thousand crowns return to Navarre, we never learn. This matter, then, being postponed till a more fitting season, the whole set abandon themselves to what Dr. Johnson calls "strenuous idleness." The King and his courtiers forswear their studies, and every man becomes a lover and a sonneteer; the refined traveller of Spain resigns himself to his passion for the dairy-maid; the schoolmaster and the curate talk learnedly after dinner; and, at last, the King, the nobles, the priest, the pedant, the braggart, the page, and the clown join in one dance of mummery, in which they all laugh, and are laughed at. But still all this idleness is too energetic to warrant us in calling this the Comedy of Leisure. Let us try again. Is it not the Comedy of Affectations?

Molière, in his 'Précieuses Ridicules,' has admirably hit off *one* affectation that had found its way into the private life of his own times. The ladies aspired to be wooed after the fashion of the Grand Cyrus. Madelon will be called Polixène, and Cathos

Aminte. They dismiss their plain honest lovers, because marriage ought to be at the end of the romance, and not at the beginning. They dote upon Mascarille (the disguised lacquey) when he assures them "Les gens de qualité savent tout sans avoir jamais rien appris." They are in ecstasies at everything. Madelon is "furieusement pour les portraits;"—Cathos loves "terriblement les énigmes." Even Mascarille's ribbon is "furieusement bien choisi;"—his gloves "sentent terriblement bons;"—and his feathers are "effroyablement belles." But, in the 'Précieuses Ridicules,' Molière, as we have said, dealt with one affectation;—in 'Love's Labour's Lost' Shakspeare presents us almost every variety of affectation that is founded upon a misdirection of intellectual activity. We have here many of the forms in which cleverness is exhibited as opposed to wisdom, and false refinement as opposed to simplicity. The affected characters, even the most fantastical, are not fools; but, at the same time, the natural characters, who, in this play, are chiefly the women, have their intellectual foibles. All the modes of affectation are developed in one continued stream of fun and drollery;—every one is laughing at the folly of the other, and the laugh grows louder and louder as the more natural characters, one by one, trip up the heels of the more affected. The most affected at last join in the laugh with the most natural; and the whole comes down to "plain kersey yea and nay,"—from the syntax of Holofernes, and the "fire-new words" of Armado, to "greasy Joan" and "roasted crabs."—Let us hastily review the comedy under this aspect.

The affectation of the King and his courtiers begins at the very beginning of the play. The mistake upon which they set out, in their desire to make their court "a little academe," is not an uncommon one. It is the attempt to separate the contemplative from the active life; to forego duties for abstractions; to sacrifice innocent pleasures for plans of mortification, difficult to be executed, and useless if carried through. Many a young student has been haunted by the same dream; and he only required to

be living in an age when vows bound mankind to objects of pursuit that now present but the ludicrous side, to have had his dreams converted into very silly realities. The resistance of Biron to the vow of his fellows is singularly able,—his reasoning is deep and true, and ought to have turned them aside from their folly:—

“Study is like the heaven’s glorious sun,
That will not be deep-search’d with saucy
looks;
Small have continual plodders ever won,
Save base authority from others’ books.”

But the vow is ratified, and its abjuration will only be the result of its practical inconvenience. The “French king’s daughter,” the “admired princess,” is coming to confer with the King and his court, who have resolved to talk with no woman for three years:—

“So study evermore is overshot.”

But the “child of fancy” appears—the “fantastic”—the “magnificent”—the “man of great spirit who grows melancholy”—he who is “ill at a reckoning, because it fitteth the spirit of a tapster”—he who confesses to be a “gentleman and a gamester,” because “both are the varnish of a complete man.” How capitally does Moth, his page, hit him off, when he intimates that only “the base vulgar” call deuce-ace three! And yet this indolent piece of refinement is

“A man in all the world’s new fashions planted,
That hath a mint of phrases in his brain;”

and he himself has no mean idea of his abilities—he is “for whole volumes in folio.” Moth, who continually draws him out to laugh at him, is an embryo wag, whose common sense is constantly opposed to his master’s affectations; and Costard is another cunning bit of nature, though cast in a coarser mould, whose heart runs over with joy at the tricks of his little friend, this “nit of mischief.”

The Princess and her train arrive at Navarre. We have already learnt to like the King and his lords, and have seen their fine natures shining through the affectations by

which they are clouded. We scarcely require, therefore, to hear their eulogies delivered from the mouths of the Princess’s ladies, who have appreciated their real worth. Biron, however, has all along been our favourite; and we feel that, in some degree, he deserves the character which Rosaline gives him:—

“A merrier man,
Within the limit of becoming mirth,
I never spent an hour’s talk withal:
His eye begets occasion for his wit;
For every object that the one doth catch
The other turns to a mirth-moving jest;
Which his fair tongue (conceit’s expositor)
Delivers in such apt and gracious words,
That aged ears play truant at his tales,
And younger hearings are quite ravished;
So sweet and voluble is his discourse.”

But, with all this disposition to think highly of the nobles of the self-denying court, the “mad wenches” of France are determined to use their “civil wits” on “Navarre and his bookmen,” for their absurd vows; and well do they keep their determination. Boyet is a capital courtier, always ready for a gibe at the ladies, and always ready to bear their gibes. Costard thinks he is “a most simple clown;” but Biron more accurately describes him at length:—

“Why, this is he
That kiss’d away his hand in courtesy:
This is the ape of form, monsieur the nice,
That, when he plays at tables, chides the dice
In honourable terms; nay, he can sing
A mean most meanly; and, in ushering,
Mend him who can: the ladies call him, sweet;
The stairs, as he treads on them, kiss his feet.”

We are very much tempted to think that, in his character of Boyet, Shakspeare had in view that most amusing coxcomb Master Robert Laneham, whose letter from Kenilworth, in which he gives the following account of himself, was printed in 1575:—“Always among the gentlewomen with my good will, and when I see company according, then I can be as lively too. Sometimes I foot it with dancing; now with my gittern and else with my cittern; then at the virginals; ye know nothing comes amiss to me; then carol I up

a song withal, that by and by they come flocking about me like bees to honey, and ever they cry, 'Another, good Laneham, another.' "

Before the end of Navarre's first interview with the Princess, Boyet has discovered that he is "infected." At the end of the next act, we learn from Biron himself that he is in the same condition. Away then goes the vow with the King and Biron. In the fourth act we find that the infection has spread to all the lords; but the love of the King and his courtiers is thoroughly characteristic. It may be sincere enough, but it is still love fantastical.—It hath taught Biron "to rhyme and to be melancholy." The King drops his paper of poesy; Longaville reads his sonnet, which makes flesh "a deity;" and Dumain, in his most beautiful anacreontic, —as sweet a piece of music as Shakspeare ever penned—shows "how love can vary wit." The scene in which each lover is detected by the other, and all laughed at by Biron, till he is detected himself, is thoroughly dramatic; and there is perhaps nothing finer in the whole range of the Shakspearean comedy than the passage where Biron casts aside his disguises, and rises to the height of poetry and eloquence. The burst when the "rent lines" discover "some love" of Biron is incomparably fine:—

"Who sees the heavenly Rosaline,
That like a rude and savage man of Inde,
At the first opening of the gorgeous east,
Bows not his vassal head; and, stricken blind,
Kisses the base ground with obedient
breast?"

The famous speech of Biron, which follows, is perhaps unmatched as a display of poetical rhetoric, except by the speeches of Ulysses to Achilles in the third act of 'Troilus and Cressida.' Coleridge has admirably described this speech of Biron. "It is logic clothed in rhetoric;—but observe how Shakspeare, in his twofold being of poet and philosopher, avails himself of it to convey profound truths in the most lively images—the whole remaining faithful to the character supposed to utter the lines, and the expressions themselves constituting a further de-

velopment of that character."* The rhetoric of Biron produces its effect. "Now to plain dealing," says Longaville; but Biron, the merry man, whose love is still half fun, is for more circuitous modes than laying their hearts at the feet of their mistresses. He is of opinion that

"Revels, dances, masks, and merry hours,
Forerun fair Love;"

and he therefore recommends "some strange pastime" to solace the dames. But "the gallants will be task'd."

King and Princess, lords and ladies, must make way for the great pedants. The form of affectation is now entirely changed. It is not the cleverness of rising superior to all other men by despising the "affects" to which every man is born—it is not the cleverness of labouring at the most magnificent phrases to express the most common ideas; but it is the cleverness of two persons using conventional terms, which they have picked up from a common source, and which they believe sealed to the mass of mankind, instead of employing the ordinary colloquial phrases by which ideas are rendered intelligible. This is pedantry—and Shakspeare shows his excellent judgment in bringing a brace of pedants upon the scene. In O'Keefe's 'Agreeable Surprise,' and in Colman's 'Heir at Law,' we have a single pedant—the one talking Latin to a milk-maid, and the other to a tallow-chandler. This is farce. But the pedantry of Holofernes and the curate is comedy. They each address the other in their freemasonry of learning. They each flatter the other. But for the rest of the world, they look down upon them. "Sir," saith the curate, excusing the "twice-sod simplicity" of Goodman Dull, "he hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a book; he hath not eat paper, as it were; he hath not drunk ink: his intellect is not replenished." But Goodman Dull has his intellect stimulated by this abuse. He has heard the riddles of the "ink-horn" men, and he sports a riddle of his own:—

* 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 105.

"You two are book-men: Can you tell by your wit,
What was a month old at Cain's birth, that's
not five weeks old as yet?"

The answer of Holofernes is the very quintessence of pedantry. He gives Goodman Dull the hardest name for the moon in the mythology. Goodman Dull is with difficulty quieted. Holofernes then exhibits his poetry; and he "will something affect the letter, for it argues facility." He produces, as all pedants attempt to produce, not what is good when executed, but what is difficult of execution. Satisfied with his own performances—"the gift is good in those in whom it is acute, and I am thankful for it"—he is profuse in his contempt for other men's productions. He undertakes to prove Biron's canonet "to be very unlearned, neither savouring of poetry, wit, nor invention." The portrait is two hundred years old, and yet how many of the present day might sit for it! Holofernes, however, is not meant by Shakspeare for a blockhead. He is made of better stuff than the ordinary run of those who "educate youth at the charge-house." Shakspeare has taken care that we should see flashes of good sense amidst his folly. To say nothing of the curate's commendations of his "reasons at dinner," we have his own description of Armado, to show how clearly he could discover the ludicrous side of others. The pedant can see the ridiculous in pedantry of another stamp. But the poet also takes care that the ridiculous side of "the two learned men" shall still be prominent. Moth and Costard are again brought upon the scene to laugh at those who "have been at a great feast of languages, and have stolen the scraps." Costard himself is growing affected. He has picked up the fashion of being clever, and he has himself stolen *honorificabilitudinitatibus* out of "the alms-basket of words." But business proceeds:—Holofernes will present before the Princess the nine worthies, and he will play three himself. The soul of the schoolmaster is in this magnificent device; and he looks down with most self-satisfied pity on honest Dull, who has spoken no word, and understood none.

The ladies have received verses and jewels from their lovers; but they trust not to the verses—they think them "bootless rhymes,"—the effusions of "prodigal wits:"—

"Folly in fools bears not so strong a note
As foolery in the wise."

When Boyet discloses to the Princess the scheme of the mask of Muscovites, she is more confirmed in her determination to laugh at the laughers:—

"They do it but in mocking merriment;
And mock for mock is only my intent."

The affectation of "speeches penn'd" is overthrown in a moment by the shrewdness of the women, who encounter the fustian harangue with prosaic action. Moth comes in crammed with others' affectations:—

"All hail, the richest beauties on the earth!
A holy parcel of the fairest dames"—

The ladies turn their backs on him—

"That ever turn'd their—*backs*—to mortal
views!"

Biron in vain gives him the cue—"their eyes, villain, their eyes:"—"the pigeon-egg of discretion" has ceased to be discreet—he is out, and the speech is ended. The maskers will try for themselves. They each take a masked lady apart, and each finds a wrong mistress, who has no sympathy with him. The keen breath of "mocking wenches" has puffed out all their fine conceits:—

"Well, better wits have worn plain statute-caps."

The sharp medicine has had its effect. The King and his lords return without their disguises; and, being doomed to hear the echo of the laugh at their folly, they come down from their stilts to the level ground of common sense:—from "taffeta phrases" and "figures pedantical" to

"Russet yeas, and honest kersey noes."

But the Worthies are coming; we have not yet done with the affectations and the mocking merriment. Biron maliciously desires "to have one show worse than the King's and his company." Those who have

been laughed at now take to laughing at others. Costard, who is the most natural of the Worthies, comes off with the fewest hurts. He has performed Pompey marvellously well, and he is not a little vain of his performance—"I hope I was perfect." When the learned curate breaks down as Alexander, the apology of Costard for his overthrow is inimitable: "There, an 't shall please you; a foolish mild man; an honest man, look you, and soon dashed! He is a marvellous good neighbour, in sooth; and a very good bowler; but, for Alisander, alas! you see how 't is; a little o'erparted." Holofernes comes off worse than the curate—"Alas, poor Machabæus, how hath he been baited!" We feel, in spite of our inclination to laugh at the pedant, that his remonstrance is just—"This is not generous, not gentle, not humble." We know that to be generous, to be gentle, to be humble, are the especial virtues of the great; and Shakspeare makes us see that the school-master is right. Lastly, comes Armado. His discomfiture is still more signal. The malicious trick that Biron suggests to Costard shows that Rosaline's original praise of him was not altogether deserved—that his merriment was not always

"Within the limit of becoming mirth."

The affectations of Biron are cast aside, but

he has a natural fault to correct, worse than any affectation; and beautifully does Rosaline hold up to him the glass which shows him how

"To choke a gibing spirit,
Whose influence is begot of that loose grace
Which shallow laughing hearers give to fools."

The affectations are blown into thin air. The King and his courtiers have to turn from speculation to action—from fruitless vows to deeds of charity and piety. Armado is about to apply to what is useful: "I have vowed to Jaquenetta to hold the plough for her sweet love three years." The voices of the pedants are heard no more in scraps of Latin. They are no longer "singled from the barbarous." But, on the contrary, "the dialogue that the two learned men have compiled, in praise of the owl and the cuckoo," is full of the most familiar images, expressed in the most homely language. Shakspeare, unquestionably, to our minds, brought in this most characteristic song—(a song that he might have written and sung in the chimney-corner of his father's own kitchen, long before he dreamt of having a play acted before Queen Elizabeth)—to mark, by an emphatic close, the triumph of simplicity over false refinement.

CHAPTER IV.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

IN Dr. Farmer's 'Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare,' we find this passage:—"The story of 'All's Well that Ends Well' or, as I suppose it to have been sometimes called, 'Love's Labour Wonne'" (and here Farmer inserts a reference to Meres' 'Wits' Treasury,' where 'Love's Labour Wonne' is mentioned amongst plays by Shakspeare,) "is originally indeed the property of Boccace, but it came immediately to Shakspeare from Painter's 'Giletta of Narbon.'" Mr. Hun-

ter, in his 'Disquisition on the Tempest,' repudiates the notion that 'Love's Labour Won' and 'All's Well that Ends Well' are identical. Mr. Hunter states that a passing remark of Dr. Farmer, in the 'Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare,' first pointed out this supposed identity; and he adds, "the remark has since been caught up and repeated by a thousand voices. Yet it was made in the most casual, random, and hasty manner imaginable. It was supported by

no kind of argument or evidence ; and I cannot find that any persons who have repeated it after him have shown any probable grounds for the opinion." Malone, in the *first* edition of his 'Chronological Order of Shakspeare's Plays,' assigns the date of this comedy to 1598, upon the authority of the passage in Meres. He says, "No other of our author's plays could have borne that title ('Love's Labour Won') with so much propriety as that before us ; yet it must be acknowledged that the present title is inserted in the body of the play:—

'All's well that ends well : still the fine's the crown.'

This line, however, might certainly have suggested the alteration of what has been thought the first title, and affords no decisive proof that this piece was originally called 'All's Well that Ends Well.' When Coleridge describes this play as "originally intended as the *counterpart* of 'Love's Labour's Lost,'"—when Mrs. Jameson, with reference to the nature of the plot and the suitableness of the title found in Meres, states, complainingly, "Why the title was altered, or by whom, I cannot discover,"—and when Tieck says, "The *poet* probably first called this play 'Love's Labour Won,'"—we may add the opinions of these eminent writers on Shakspeare to the original opinion of Malone, in opposition to the opinion of Mr. Hunter, that "the leading features of the story in 'All's Well' cannot be said to be aptly represented by the title in Meres' list."

Coleridge described this play as the *counterpart* of 'Love's Labour's Lost.' Shakspeare's titles, in the judgment of our philosophical critic, always exhibit "great significancy." The Labour of Love which is *Lost* is not a very earnest labour. The King and his courtiers are fantastical lovers. They would win their mistresses by "bootless rhymes" and "speeches penn'd," and their most sincere declarations are thus only received as "mocking merriment." The concluding speeches of the ladies to their lovers show clearly that Shakspeare meant to mark the cause why their labour was lost—it was

labour hastily taken up, pursued in a light temper, assuming the character of "pleasant jest and courtesy." The Princess and her ladies would not accept it as "labour" without a year's probation. It was offered, they thought, "in heat of blood ;"—theirs was a love which only bore "gaudy blossoms." What would naturally be the counterpart of such a story? One of passionate, enduring, all-pervading love—of a love that shrinks from no difficulty, resents no unkindness, fears no disgrace, but perseveres, under the most adverse circumstances, to vindicate its own claims by its own energy, and to achieve success by the strength of its own will. This is the Labour of Love which is Won. Is not this the story of 'All's Well that Ends Well?'

When Helena, in the first scene, so beautifully describes the hopelessness of her love—

"It were all one

That I should love a bright particular star,
And think to wed it, he is so above me"—

could she propose to come within "his sphere" without some extraordinary effort? "Hic labor, hoc opus est." She does resolve to make the effort ; it is within the bounds of possibility that her labour may be successful, and therefore her "intents are fix'd :"—

"The mightiest space in fortune nature brings
To join like likes, and kiss like native things.
Impossible be strange attempts to those
That weigh their pains in sense, and do suppose

What hath been cannot be."

Inferior natures, that estimate their labours by a common standard—"that weigh their pains in sense"—that are not supported in their labours by a spirit which rejects all fear and embraces all hope,—confound the difficult with the impossible : they know that courage has triumphed over difficulty, but they still think "what hath been cannot be" again. Helena is not of their mind :—

"My project may deceive me,
But my intents are fix'd, and will not leave me."

This is the purpose avowed from the commencement of the dramatic action; which marks every stage of its progress; which is essentially 'Love's Labour,' whether it be won or be lost. How beautifully does Shakspeare relieve us from the feeling that it is unsexual for the labour to be undertaken by Helena, through the compassion which she inspires in the good old Countess:—

"It is the show and seal of nature's truth,
Where love's strong passion is impress'd in
youth."

How delicately, too, does he make Helena hold to her determination, even whilst she confesses to the Countess the secret of her ambitious love:—

"My friends were poor but honest; so's my
love:

Be not offended; for it hurts not him
That he is loved of me: I follow him not
Be any token of presumptuous suit;
Nor would I have him, *till I do deserve him.*"

Again:—

"There's something hints,
More than my father's skill, which was the
greatest
Of his profession, that his good receipt
Shall, *for my legacy*, be sanctified
By the luckiest stars in heaven,"—

not for the cure of the King only, but for the winning of her labour. To obtain the full advantage of her legacy no common qualities were required in Helena. "Wisdom and constancy" are her characteristics, as Lafeu truly describes. The "constancy" with which she enforces her power upon the mind of the incredulous King is prominently exhibited by the poet. Her modesty never overcomes the ruling purpose of her soul. She indeed says,

"I will no more enforce mine office on you;"

but she immediately after presses her "fix'd intents":—

"What I can do can do no hurt to try."

She succeeds:—

"Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth
speak."

The reward, however, which she seeks is avowed without hesitation. Her will was too strong to admit of that timidity which might have clung to a feebler mind:—

"Then shalt thou give me, with thy kingly
hand,
What husband in thy power I will command."

Up to this point all has been "labour"—the conception of a high and dangerous purpose—the carrying it through without shrinking. When the cure is effected, and she has to avow her choice, comes a still greater labour. The struggle within herself is most intense:—

"Now, Dian, from thy altar do I fly;"

and—

"The blushes in my cheeks thus whisper me,—
'We blush, that *thou* shouldst choose,'"

these expressions sufficiently give the key to what passes within her. Her feelings amount almost to agony when Bertram refuses her, and for a moment she abandons her fix'd intent:—

"That you are well restor'd, my lord, I'm glad;
Let the rest go."

"But shall she weakly relinquish the golden opportunity, and dash the cup from her lips at the moment it is presented? Shall she cast away the treasure for which she has ventured both life and honour, when it is just within her grasp? Shall she, after compromising her feminine delicacy by the public disclosure of her preference, be thrust back into shame, 'to blush out the remainder of her life,' and die a poor, lost, scorned thing? This would be very pretty and interesting and characteristic in Viola or Ophelia, but not at all consistent with that high determined spirit, that moral energy, with which Helena is portrayed."* Helena suffers Bertram to be forced upon her—and this is the greatest "labour" of all.

After the marriage and the desertion "Love's labour" is still most untiringly tasked. Love next assumes the sweet and

* Mrs. Jameson's 'Characteristics,' vol. i. p. 212.

smiling aspect of duty. "What's his will else?"—"what more commands he?"—

"In everything I wait upon his will"—

are all the replies she makes to the harsh commands of her lord, conveyed by a frivolous messenger. In her parting interview with Bertram, in which his coldness and dislike are scarcely attempted to be concealed, the same spirit alone exists. She has a harder trial still. Her lord avows his final abandonment of her, except upon apparently impossible conditions. She has only one complaint,—

"This is a dreadful sentence;"

but her intense love has destroyed in her all the feeling of self through which she was enabled to accomplish the triumph of her own will:—

"Poor lord! is't I

That chase thee from thy country, and expose
Those tender limbs of thine to the event
Of the none-sparing war?"

When she says "I will be gone," she probably had no purpose of seeking Bertram, and of endeavouring to reverse his "dreadful sentence" by her own management. But "love's labours" were not yet ended. Her mind was not framed to shrink from difficulty; and we soon meet her at Florence. The plot after this is such a one as Shakspeare could only have found in the legendary history of an unrefined age, preserved from oblivion by one who was imbued with the kindred genius of unveiling the brightness of the poetical, even when it was concealed from ordinary vision by the clouds of a prosaic atmosphere. Mrs. Jameson has truly observed, "All the circumstances and details with which Helena is surrounded are shocking to our feelings, and wounding to our delicacy; and yet the beauty of the character is made to triumph over all." The beauty of the character is in its intensity. By that is Helena enabled to pass through all the slough of her last "labours" without contamination; her purpose sanctifies her acts. From the first scene to the last her life is one continued struggle. But the hopeful quality of her soul never forsakes her:—

"The time will bring on summer,
When briars shall have leaves as well as
thorns,
And be as sweet as sharp."

She repines at no exertion—she shrinks from no fatigue:—

"But this exceeding posting, day and night,
Must wear *your* spirits low,"

has no reference to herself. When she finds the King has left Marseilles she has no regrets:—

"All's well that ends well, yet;
Though time seem so adverse, and means
unfit."

Her final triumph at last arrives; but it is a happiness that cannot be spoken of. Her feelings find vent in—

"O my dear *mother*, do I see you living!"

She can now, indeed, call the Countess mother. In the early scenes she dared only to name her as "mine honourable mistress." By her energy and perseverance she has conquered. Is this, or is it not, Love's Labour Won?

Malone, as we have already expressed our belief, has applied the true test to the application of Meres' title of 'Love's Labour Won:' "*No other* of our author's plays could have borne that title with so much propriety as that before us." The application, be it understood, is limited to the comedies. The title cannot be applied to 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona,' 'The Comedy of Errors,' 'Love's Labour's Lost,' 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'The Merchant of Venice,' for those are also mentioned in Meres' list as existing in 1598. Can it have reference to 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' than which no title can be more definite;—to 'The Taming of the Shrew,' equally defined; to 'Twelfth Night' or 'Measure for Measure,' or 'Much Ado about Nothing,' or 'As You Like It,' or 'The Winter's Tale?'—We think not;—we are sure that none of our readers who are familiar with the plots of these plays can believe that either of them was so named. We, of course, here put the question of chronology out of view. Mr. Hunter, to support his opinion that 'The Tempest' was

written in 1596, boldly maintains the following opinion:—"But if not to the 'All's Well,' to what play of Shakspeare was this title once attached? I answer, that of the existing plays there is only 'The Tempest' to which it can be supposed to belong: and, so long as it suits so well with what is a main incident of this piece, we shall not be driven to the gratuitous and improbable supposition that a play once so called is lost." The "main incident" relied upon by Mr. Hunter for the support of this theory is the following speech of Ferdinand, in the third act of 'The Tempest':—

"There be some sports are painful, and their labour
Delight in them sets off; some kinds of baseness
Are nobly undergone; and most poor matters
Point to rich ends. This my mean task
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but
The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead,
And makes my labours pleasures: Oh, she is
Ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed;
And he's composed of harshness. I must remove
Some thousands of these logs, and pile them up,
Upon a sore injunction: My sweet mistress
Weeps when she sees me work; and says, such baseness
Had never like executor. I forget:
But these sweet thoughts do even refresh my labours."

"Here then," says Mr. Hunter, "are the *Love Labours*. In the end they *won* the lady." We venture to say that our belief in the significancy of Shakspeare's titles would be at an end if even a "main incident" was to suggest a name, instead of the general course of the thought or action. In this case there are really no *Love Labours* at all. The lady is *not* won by the piling of the logs; the audience know that both Ferdinand and Miranda are under the influence of Prospero's spells, and the magician has explained to them why he enforces these harsh "labours." In the first act, when Ferdinand and Miranda are thrown together, Prospero says,—

"It goes on, I see,
As my soul prompts it. Spirit, fine spirit,
I'll free thee
Within two days for this."

Again:—

"At the first sight
They have changed eyes: Delicate Ariel,
I'll set thee free for this."

Yet he adds,—

"They are both in either's powers: *But this swift business*
I must uneasy make, lest too light winning
Make the prize light."

Would Shakspeare have chosen this incident—not a "main incident," for we all along know Prospero's real intentions—as that which would furnish a title to his play? The pain which Ferdinand endures is very transient; and Prospero, when he removes the infliction, says,—

"All thy vexations
Were but my trials of thy love, and thou
Hast strangely stood the test."

We know that the *Love Labours* of Ferdinand are not severe trials, and that at their worst they were refreshed with "sweet thoughts." Can they be compared with the *Love's Labour* of Helena?

Mr. Hunter rejects the claim of 'All's Well that Ends Well' to be named *Love's Labour Won*, most decisively, but upon one ground only: "If ever there was a play," he says, "which itself bespoke its own title from the beginning, it is this:—

'We must away;
Our waggon is prepared, and time revives us:
All's Well that Ends Well: still the fine's the crown;
Whate'er the course, the end is the renown.'

"Again:—

'*All's well that Ends Well*, yet;
Though time seem so adverse, and means unfit.'

"And, as if this were not sufficient, in the epilogue:—

'The king's a beggar, now the play is done:
All is well ended, if this suit is won.'

We venture to think that the use of the

word *won* in the last line might have suggested to Mr. Hunter the possibility of the play having a double title—the one derived from the one great incident of the piece,—the other from the application of its dramatic action. Mr. Hunter, however, rejects the claim of ‘All’s Well that Ends Well’ to the title of Meres, upon the assumption that it could only have had a single title; whilst he seeks to establish the claim of ‘The Tempest’ to the title of Meres, upon the assumption that it had a double title: “I suspect that the play originally had a double title, ‘The Tempest, or Love’s Labour Won;’ just as another of the plays had a double title, ‘Twelfth Night, or What You Will.’” This reasoning is, to say the least of it, illogical. If the argument is good for ‘The Tempest,’ it is good for ‘All’s Well that Ends Well.’

Whether or no ‘The Tempest,’ looking at the internal evidence of its date, could have been included in Meres’ list, there can be no doubt that ‘All’s Well that Ends Well’ has many evidences of having been an early composition—unquestionably so in parts. When Malone changed his theory with regard to the date, and assigned it to 1606, in the posthumous edition of his ‘Chronological Order,’ he relied principally upon the tone of a particular passage: “The beautiful speech of the sick King in this play has much the air of that moral and judicious reflection that accompanies an advanced period of life, and bears no resemblance to Shakspeare’s manner in his earlier plays.” The mind of Shakspeare was so essentially dramatic, that when he puts serious and moral words into the mouth of a sick King, who is growing old, we should be no more disposed to believe that the sentiment has reference to the individual feelings of the poet than we should believe that all the exuberant gaiety of some of his comic characters could only have been produced by the reflection of his own spirit of youth. “Shakspeare’s *manner* in his earlier plays” has, however, much more to assist us in approximating to a date. The manner—by which we mean the metrical arrangement and the peculiarities of construction—in ‘All’s Well that Ends Well’ certainly

places it, for the most part, in the class of his earlier plays. Where, except in the class of the earlier plays, shall we find one in which the rhyming couplet so constantly occurs? But then, again, we occasionally encounter all the music and force of thought of his most perfect blank-verse. Tieck is of opinion that the play, as we have it, contains an engrafting of the poet’s later style upon his earlier labours. He says, “Rich subject-matter, variety of situation, marvellous development, and striking catastrophe allured the young poet, who probably, later in life, would not have chosen a subject so unsuited to dramatic treatment. Some passages, not merely difficult, but almost impossible to be understood, remain out of the first attempt; and here the poet combats with language and thought—the verse is artificial, the expressions forced. Much of what I consider later alterations reminds us of the Sonnets, and of ‘Venus and Adonis.’ The prose, particularly in the last acts, is so pure and clear,—the scenes with Parolles are so excellently written,—that in all that concerns the language we must reckon them amongst Shakspeare’s best efforts. The first act is the most obscure; and here are probably the most extensive remains of the older work. The last half of the delineation of Parolles must belong to Shakspeare’s later period.”

Malone assigns his second conjectural date of this play to 1606 upon other ground than that of Shakspeare’s manner: “Another circumstance which induces me to believe that this is a later play than I had formerly supposed is the satirical mention made of the puritans, who were the objects of King James’s aversion.” Surely the poet might allude to the famous contention about wearing the surplice, without being led to it by the aversions of King James. The contest had been going on for many years, and Hooker, in his fifth book of ‘Ecclesiastical Polity,’ published in 1597, refutes the puritanical opinions upon this matter at great length. Upon the subject of the surplice he distinctly says that the hostility of the puritans was much modified when he wrote. The controversy had raged with the greatest violence at the period when Shakspeare, ac-

according to our belief, was most likely to have produced 'All's Well that Ends Well,'—perhaps not as it has been handed down to us, but in an imperfect form. That period was probably not very widely separated from the period when 'Love's Labour's Lost' was produced; to which, as we do not hesitate to think, with Coleridge, this play was the counterpart.

Having thus traced the principal dramatic action of 'All's Well that Ends Well' in the endeavour to show that it is identical with 'Love's Labour Won,' we may conclude this notice with a brief sketch of its characters.

Of Helena we have necessarily spoken at length. Mrs. Jameson quotes a passage from Foster's 'Essays' to explain the general idea of her character: "To be tremblingly alive to gentle impressions, and yet be able to preserve, when the prosecution of a design requires it, an immoveable heart amidst even the most imperious causes of subduing emotion, is perhaps not an impossible constitution of mind, but it is the utmost and rarest endowment of humanity." This "constitution of mind" has been created by Shakspeare in his Helena, and who can doubt the truth and nature of the conception?

Bertram, like all mixed characters, whether in the drama or in real life, is a great puzzle to those who look without tolerance on human motives and actions. In a one-sided view he has no redeeming qualities. Johnson says, "I cannot reconcile my heart to Bertram; a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helena as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate: when she is dead by his unkindness sneaks home to a second marriage: is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness." If the Bertram of the comedy were a real personage of flesh and blood, with whom the business of life associated us, and of whom the exercise of prudence demanded that we should form an accurate estimate, we should say—

"Too bad for a blessing, too good for a curse,
I wish from my soul thou wert better or worse."

But we are called upon for no such judgment when the poet presents to us a character of contradictory qualities. All that we have then to ask is, whether the character is natural, and consistent with the circumstances amidst which he moves? We have no desire to reconcile our hearts to Bertram; all that we demand is, that he should not move our indignation beyond the point in which his qualities shall consist with our sympathy for Helena in her love for him. And in this view the poet, as it appears to us, has drawn Bertram's character most skilfully. Without his defects the dramatic action could not have proceeded; without his merits the dramatic sentiment could not have been maintained. Shakspeare, from the first, makes us understand that the pride of birth in Bertram constrained him to regard Helena as greatly his inferior. His parting with her is decisive: "The best wishes that can be forged in your thoughts be servants to you." This is the kindness of one who had known her long, and pitied her dependent state. But he leaves no doubt as to the sense which he entertains of her condition: "Be comfortable to my mother, *your mistress*, and make much of her." When the King proposes Helena to him as his wife, he assigns but one reason for his rejection of her—but that is all in all:—

"I know her well;
She had her breeding at my father's charge:
A poor physician's daughter my wife!"

If Bertram had seen Helena with the eyes of his mother, as

"A maid too virtuous
For the contempt of empire,"—

or with those of the King and of Lafew,—he would not have rejected her, and the comedy would have been only a common love-tale. Johnson says he marries Helena "as a coward." This is unjust. Johnson overlooked the irresistible constraint to which his will was subjected, and the scorn with which he spoke out his real purposes even at the moment of submission:—

"Pardon, my gracious lord; for I submit
My fancy to your eyes: When I consider

What great creation, and what dole of honour,
Flies where you bid it, I find, that she, which
late

Was in my nobler thoughts most base, is now
The praised of the king; who, so ennobled,
Is, as 't were, born so."

Nothing can be less like cowardice than this speech. It is the bitterest irony of a desperate will, bowed for a time, but not subdued. Nor does Bertram leave Helena as "a profligate." We, who know the intensity of her love, which he could not know, may think that he was unwise to fly from his own happiness; but he believed that he fled from constraint and misery; from

"The dark house, and the detested wife."

The Bertram of the Florentine wars has something to recommend him besides his ancestry: "he has done worthy service." But the young, proud, courageous Bertram is also a libertine. Schlegel asks, "Did Shakspeare ever attempt to mitigate the impression of his unfeeling pride and giddy dissipation? He intended merely to give us a military portrait." This is quite true. The libertines of the later comedy are the only generous, spirited, intellectual persons of the drama; the virtuous characters are as dull as they are discreet. Shakspeare goes out of his usual dramatic spirit in this play, to mark emphatically the impression which Bertram's actions produce upon his own associates. In the third scene of the fourth act they comment with indignation upon his desertion of Helena, and his practices towards Diana: "As we are ourselves what things are we!" But then all the Shakspearean tolerance is put forth to make us understand that Bertram is not isolated in his vices, and that even his vices, as those of all other men, are not alone to be regarded in our estimates of character: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues." This is philosophy, and, what is more, it is religion—for it is charity. In this spirit the poet undoubtedly intended that we should judge Bertram. He is cer-

tainly not a hypocrite: and, when he returns to Rousillon, we are bound to believe him when he speaks of Helena as

"She, whom all men praised, and whom myself

Since I have lost have loved."

For ourselves, we can see no poetical injustice that he is "dismissed to happiness;" for, unless he has become a "sadder and a wiser man," he will not be happy.

"In this piece," says Schlegel, "*age* is exhibited to singular advantage: the plain honesty of the King, the good-natured impetuosity of old Lafeu, the maternal indulgence of the Countess to Helena's love of her son, seem all, as it were, to vie with each in endeavours to conquer the arrogance of the young Count." The general benevolence of these characters, and their particular kindness towards Helena, are the counterpoises to Bertram's pride of birth, and his disdain of virtue unaccompanied by adventitious distinctions. The love of the Countess towards Helena is habit,—that of the King is gratitude: in Lafeu the admiration which he perseveringly holds towards her is the result of his honest sagacity. He admires what is direct and unpretending, and he therefore loves Helena: he hates what is evasive and boastful, and he therefore despises Parolles.

Parolles has been called by Ulrici "the little appendix of the great Falstaff." Schlegel says, "Falstaff has thrown Parolles into the shade." Johnson goes farther, and declares, "Parolles has many of the lineaments of Falstaff." In our view this opinion of Johnson exhibits a singular want of discrimination in one who relished Falstaff so highly. Parolles is literally what he is described by Helena:—

"I know him a notorious liar,

Think him a great way fool, solely a coward."

For the "fool," take the scene in the second act, in which he pieces out the remarks of Lafeu upon the King's recovery with the most impertinent commonplaces—ending "Nay, 't is strange, 't is very strange, that is the brief and the tedious of it." It was in this dialogue that Lafeu "smoked him;" and he makes no secret, afterwards, of his

opinion: "I did think thee, for two ordinaries, to be a pretty wise fellow; thou didst make tolerable vent of thy travel; it might pass: yet the scarfs and the bannerets about thee did manifoldly dissuade me from believing thee a vessel of too great a burthen. I have now found thee." To the insults of Lafeu the boaster has nothing to oppose,—neither wit nor courage. His very impudence is overborne. We thoroughly agree with Lafeu, that "there can be no kernel in this light nut." All this is but a preparation for the comic scenes in which he is to play so conspicuous a part—in which his folly, his falsehood, and his cowardice conspire to make him odious and ridiculous. Before this exhibition he is denounced to Bertram, by his companions in warfare, as "a hilding"—"a bubble"—"a most notable coward, an infinite and endless liar, an hourly promise-breaker, the owner of no one good quality." The disclosure which he makes of his own folly before he is seized, when the lords overhear him, is perfectly true to nature, and therefore in the highest degree true comedy:—

"*Par.* Ten o'clock: within these three hours 't will be time enough to go home. What shall I say I have done? It must be a very plausible invention that carries it: They begin to smoke me: and disgraces have of late knocked too often at my door. I find my tongue is too fool-hardy; but my heart hath the fear of Mars before it, and of his creatures, not daring the reports of my tongue.

1 *Lord.* This is the first truth that e'er thine own tongue was guilty of. [*Aside.*

Par. What the devil should move me to undertake the recovery of this drum; being not ignorant of the impossibility, and knowing I had no such purpose? I must give myself some hurts, and say I got them in exploit: Yet slight ones will not carry it: They will say, Came you off with so little? and great ones I dare not give. Wherefore? what's the instance? Tongue, I must put you into a butter-woman's mouth, and buy myself another of Bajazet's mule, if you prattle me into these perils.

1 *Lord.* Is it possible he should know what he is, and be that he is? [*Aside.*]

The last sentence is worth a folio of 'Moral

Essays.' But Parolles certainly knows himself. There is nothing but plain knavery, mistaking its proper tools, in his lies and his treacheries. The meanness of his nature is his safeguard: after his detection the consolations of his philosophy are most characteristic:—

"Yet am I thankful: *if my heart were great,*
'T would burst at this: Captain I'll be no more;

But I will eat and drink, and sleep as soft
As captain shall; simply the thing I am
Shall make me live. Who knows himself a
braggart

Let him fear this; for it will come to pass,
That every braggart shall be found an ass.
Rust, sword! cool, blushes! and, Parolles,
live

Safest in shame! being fool'd by foolery
thrive!

There's place and means for every man alive."

And he will "live." Lafeu understands him to the last, when he says, "Though you are a fool and a knave, you shall eat."

And is this crawling, empty, vapouring, cowardly representative of the off-scourings of social life, to be compared for a moment with the inimitable Falstaff?—to be said to have "many lineaments in common" with him—to be thrown into the shade by him—to be even "a little appendix" to his greatness? Parolles is drawn by Shakspeare as utterly contemptible, in intellect, in spirit, in morals. He is diverting from the situations into which his folly betrays him; and his complete exposure and humiliation constitute the richness of the comedy. If he had been a particle better, Shakspeare would have made his disgrace less; and it is in his charity even to the most degraded that he has represented him as utterly insensible to his own shame, and even hugging it as a good:—

"If my heart were great,

'T would burst at this."

But Falstaff, witty beyond all other characters of wit—cautious, even to the point of being thought cowardly—swaying all men by his intellectual resources under the greatest difficulty—boastful and lying only in a

spirit of hilarity, which makes him the first to enjoy his own detection—and withal, though grossly selfish, so thoroughly genial that many love him and few can refuse to laugh with him—is Falstaff to be compared with Parolles, the notorious liar—great way fool—solely a coward? The comparison will not bear examining with patience, and much less with painstaking.

But Parolles in his own way is infinitely comic. "The scene of the drum," according to a French critic, "is worthy of Molière."* This is the highest praise which a French writer could bestow; and here it is just.

* Letourneur, 'Traduction,' tome ix. p. 329.

The character belongs to the school of which Molière is the head, rather than to the school of Shakspeare.

And what shall we say of the clown? He is "the artificial fool;" and we do not like him, therefore, quite so much as dear Launce and dearer Touchstone. To the Fool in 'Lear' he can no more be compared than Parolles to Falstaff. But he is, nevertheless, great—something that no other artist but Shakspeare could have produced. Our poet has used him as a vehicle for some biting satire. There can be no doubt that he is "a witty fool," "a shrewd knave, and an unhappy."

CHAPTER V.

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW.

'THE TAMING OF THE SHREW' was first printed in the folio collection of Shakspeare's Plays in 1623. It is not one of those plays enumerated as Shakspeare's by Meres, in 1598.

The matured opinion of Malone as to the date of this play is thus given:—"I had supposed the piece now under consideration to have been written in the year 1606. On a more attentive perusal of it, and more experience in our author's style and manner, I am persuaded that it was one of his *very early productions*, and near, in point of time, to 'The Comedy of Errors,' 'Love's Labour's Lost,' and 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona.' In the old comedies, antecedent to the time of our author's writing for the stage (if, indeed, they deserve that name), a kind of doggerel measure is often found, which, as I have already observed, Shakspeare adopted in some of those pieces which were undoubtedly among his early compositions: I mean his 'Errors' and 'Love's Labour's Lost.' This kind of metre, being found also in the play before us, adds support to the supposition that it was one of his early productions." Mr. Collier, however, doubts whether 'The Taming of the Shrew' can be treated

altogether as one of Shakspeare's performances:—"I am satisfied," he says, "that *more than one hand* (perhaps at distant dates) was concerned in it, and that Shakspeare had little to do with any of the scenes in which Katharine and Petruchio are not engaged." Farmer had previously expressed the same opinion, declaring the Induction to be in our poet's best manner, and a great part of the play in his worst, or even below it. To this Steevens replies—"I know not to whom I could impute this comedy, if Shakspeare was not its author. I think his hand is visible in almost every scene, though perhaps not so evidently as in those which pass between Katharine and Petruchio." Mr. Collier judges that "the underplot much resembles the dramatic style of William Haughton, author of an extant comedy, called 'Englishmen for my Money,' which was produced prior to 1598."

But there is another play, 'The Taming of a Shrew,' which first appeared in 1594, under the following title:—"A pleasant conceited Historie called the taming of a Shrew. As it was sundry times acted by the Right honourable the Earle of Pembroke his servants. Printed at London by Peter Short,

and are to be sold by Cuthbert Burbie, at his shop at the Royal Exchange, 1594.' The comedy opens with an Induction, the characters of which are a Lord, Sly, a Tapster, Page, Players, and Huntsmen. The incidents are precisely the same as those of the play which we call Shakspeare's. There is this difference in the management of the character of Sly in the anonymous comedy, that, during the whole of the performance of 'The Taming of a Shrew,' he occasionally makes his remarks; and is finally carried back to the alehouse door in a state of sleep. In Shakspeare we lose this most diverting personage before the end of the first act. After our poet had fairly launched him in the Induction, and given a tone to his subsequent demeanour during the play, the performer of the character was perhaps allowed to continue the dialogue extemporally. We doubt, by the way, whether this would have been permitted after Shakspeare had prescribed that the Clowns should "speak no more than what is set down for them."

The scene of 'The Taming of a Shrew' is laid at Athens; that of Shakspeare's at Padua. The Athens of the one and the Padua of the other are resorts of learning; the former opening thus:—

"Welcome to Athens, my beloved friend,
To Plato's school, and Aristotle's walks."

Alfonso, a merchant of Athens (the Baptista of Shakspeare), has three daughters, Kate, Emilia, and Phylema. Aurelius, son of the duke of Cestus (Sestos), is enamoured of one, Polidor of another, and Ferando (the Petrucio of Shakspeare) of Kate, the Shrew. The merchant hath sworn, before he will allow his two younger daughters to be addressed by suitors, that

"His eldest daughter first shall be espoused."

The wooing of Kate by Ferando is exactly in the same spirit as the wooing by Petrucio; so is the marriage; so the lenten entertainment of the bride in Ferando's country-house; so the scene with the Tailor and Haberdasher; so the prostrate obedience of the tamed Shrew. The underplot, however, is essentially different. The lovers of the

younger sisters do not woo them in assumed characters; though a merchant is brought to personate the Duke of Cestus. The real duke arrives, as Vincentio arrives in our play, to discover the imposture; and his indignation occupies much of the latter part of the action, with sufficient tediousness. All parties are ultimately happy and pleased; and the comedy ends with the wager, as in Shakspeare, about the obedience of the several wives, the Shrew pronouncing a homily upon the virtue and beauty of submission, which sounds much more hypocritical even than that of the Kate of our poet. There cannot be a doubt that the anonymous author and Shakspeare sometimes used the same images and forms of expression—occasionally several whole lines: the incidents of those scenes in which the process of taming the shrew is carried forward are invariably the same. The spectators of each play had the same plots to delight them. They would equally enjoy the surprise and self-satisfaction of the drunken man when he became a lord; equally relish the rough wooing of the master of "the taming school;" rejoice at the dignity of the more worthy gender when the poor woman was denied "beef and mustard;" and hold their sides with convulsive laughter when the tailor was driven off with his gown, and the haberdasher with his cap. This undoubted resemblance involves some necessity for conjecture, with very little guide from evidence. The first and most obvious hypothesis is, that 'The Taming of a Shrew' was an older play than Shakspeare's; and that he borrowed from that comedy. The question then arises, who was its author?

The dramatic works of Greene, which have been collected as his, are only six in number; and one was written in connexion with Lodge. The 'Orlando Furioso' is known to have been his, by having been mentioned by a contemporary writer. This play, in its form of publication, appears to us to bear a striking resemblance to 'The Taming of a Shrew.' The title of the first edition is as follows: 'The Historie of Orlando Furioso, one of the twelve Pieres of France. As it was plaid before the Queenes Maiestie. London, Printed by John Danter for Cuthbert

Burbie, and are to be sold at his Shop nere the Royal Exchange, 1594.' Compare this with the title of 'The Taming of a Shrew.' Each is a "Historie;" each is without an author's name; each is published by Cuthbert Burbie; each is published in the same year, 1594. Might not the recent death of Greene—the reputation which he left behind him—the unhappy circumstances attending his death, for he perished in extreme poverty—and the remarkable controversy between Nash and Harvey, in 1592, "principally touching Robert Greene"—have led the bookseller to procure and publish copies of these plays, if they were both written by him? It is impossible, we think, not to be struck with the striking resemblance of these anonymous performances, in the structure of the verse, the extravagant employment of mythological allusions, the laboured finery intermixed with feebleness, and the occasional outpouring of a rich and gorgeous fancy. In the comic parts, too, it appears to us that there is an equal similarity in the two plays—a mixture of the vapid and the coarse, which looks like the attempt of an educated man to lower himself to an uninformed audience. It is very difficult to establish these opinions without being tedious; but we may compare a detached passage or two:—

ORLANDO FURIOSO.

Orl. Is not my love like those purple-coloured swans,
That gallop by the coach of Cynthia?
Org. Yes, marry is she, my lord.
Orl. Is not her face silver'd like that milk-white shape,
When Jove came dancing down to Semele?
Org. It is, my lord.
Orl. Then go thy ways and climb up to the clouds,
And tell Apollo, that Orlando sits
Making of verses for Angelica.
And if he do deny to send me down
The shirt which Deianira sent to Hercules,
To make me brave upon my wedding-day,
Tell him, I'll pass the Alps, and up to Meroe,
(I know he knows that watery lakish hill,)
And pull the harp out of the minstrel's hands,
And pawn it unto lovely Proserpine,
That she may fetch the fair Angelica."

TAMING OF A SHREW.

Fer. Tush, Kate, these words add greater love in me,
And make me think thee fairer than before:
Sweet Kate, thou lovelier than Diana's purple robe,
Whiter than are the snowy Apennines,
Or icy hair that grows on Boreas' chin.
Father, I swear by Ibis' golden beak,
More fair and radiant is my bonny Kate
Than silver Xanthus when he doth embrace
The ruddy Simois at Ida's feet;
And care not thou, sweet Kate, how I be clad;
Thou shalt have garments wrought of Median silk,
Enchased with precious jewels fetch'd from far
By Italian merchants, that with Russian stems
Plough up huge furrows in the terrene main."

Take a passage, also, of the prose, or comic, parts of the two plays, each evidently intended for the clowns:—

ORLANDO FURIOSO.

Tom. Sirrah Ralph, an thou 'lt go with me, I'll let thee see the bravest madman that ever thou sawest.

Ralph. Sirrah Tom, I believe it was he that was at our town o' Sunday: I'll tell thee what he did, sirrah. He came to our house when all our folks were gone to church, and there was nobody at home but I, and I was turning of the spit, and he comes in and bade me fetch him some drink. Now, I went and fetched him some; and ere I came again, by my troth, he ran away with the roast meat, spit and all, and so we had nothing but porridge to dinner.

Tom. By my troth, that was brave; but, sirrah, he did so course the boys last Sunday; and, if ye call him madman, he'll run after you, and tickle your ribs so with flap of leather that he hath, as it passeth."

TAMING OF A SHREW.

San. Boy, oh disgrace to my person! Zounds, boy, of your face, you have many boys with such pickadenaunts, I am sure. Zounds, would you not have a bloody nose for this?

Boy. Come, come, I did but jest; where is that same piece of pie that I gave thee to keep?

San. The pie? Ay, you have more mind of your belly than to go see what your master does.

Boy. Tush, 't is no matter, man; I prithee give it me, I am very hungry I promise thee.

San. Why, you may take it, and the devil burst you with it! one cannot save a bit after supper, but you are always ready to munch it up.

Boy. Why, come, man, we shall have good cheer anon at the bride-house, for your master's gone to church to be married already, and there's such cheer as passeth.

San. O brave! I would I had eat no meat this week, for I have never a corner left in my belly."

'The Historie of Alphonsus King of Aragon'—one of the plays published with Greene's name, after his death—furnishes a passage or two which may be compared with the old 'Taming of a Shrew':—

ALPHONSUS KING OF ARAGON.

"Thou shalt ere long be monarch of the world.
All christen'd kings, with all your pagan dogs,
Shall bend their knees unto Iphigena.

The Indian soil shall be thine at command,
Where every step thou settest on the ground
Shall be received on the golden mines.

Rich Pactolus, that river of account,
Which doth descend from top of Tivole mount,
Shall be thine own, and all the world beside."

"Go, pack thou hence unto the Stygian lake,
And make report unto thy traitorous sire,
How well thou hast enjoy'd the diadem,
Which he by treason set upon thy head;
And, if he ask thee who did send thee down,
Alphonsus say, who now must wear thy crown.

What, is he gone? the devil break his neck!
The fiends of hell torment his traitorous
corpse!

Is this the quittance of Belinus' grace,
Which he did show unto that thankless
wretch,

That runagate, that rakehell, yea, that thief?"

TAMING OF A SHREW.

—"When I cross'd the bubbling Canibey,
And sail'd along the crystal Hellespont,
I fill'd my coffers of the wealthy mines;
Where I did cause millions of labouring Moors
To undermine the caverns of the earth,
To seek for strange and new-found precious
stones,

And dive into the sea to gather pearl,
As fair as Juno offer'd Priam's son;
And you shall take your liberal choice of all."

"I swear by fair Cynthia's burning rays,
By Merops' head, and by seven-mouthed Nile,
Had I but known ere thou hadst wedded her,
Were in thy breast the world's immortal soul,
This angry sword should rip thy hateful chest,
And hew thee smaller than the Libyan sands.

That damned villain that hath deluded me,
Whom I did send for guide unto my son.
Oh that my furious force could cleave the
earth,

That I might muster bands of hellish fiends,
To rack his heart and tear his impious soul!"

The English commentators and dramatic antiquaries, in looking around for a probable author of 'The Taming of a Shrew,' named Greene, and Peele, and Kyd. A correspondent of the editor of 'The Pictorial Shakspeare,' on the other side the Atlantic, has brought forward some remarkable resemblances between this unknown author and Marlowe. He says, "A peculiarity of expression ('Russian stems') in Marlowe's first play, 'Tamburlaine,' which had before puzzled me in the old 'Taming of a Shrew,' led me to compare the two passages, and (judge my surprise) I found the one an almost verbatim reprint of the other. This coincidence induced me to compare more closely the style of the metrical portion of 'The Taming of a Shrew' with that of 'Tamburlaine,' and afterwards of Marlowe's other plays, in which I found so strong a general resemblance, as, conjoined with many direct transfers of lines from one to the other, seem to afford good ground for attributing both to one author. As the first witness in this case, I will place side by side such passages from Marlowe's acknowledged works as are *copied* into the one without a claimant:—

MARLOWE.

'Now that the gloomy shadow of the night,
Longing to view Orion's drizzling look,
Leaps from the antarctic world unto the sky,
And dims the welkin with *his* pitchy breath.'

Faustus, p. 8, ed. 1818.

'Fairer than rocks of pearl and precious stone,

Whose eyes are brighter than the lamps of
heaven.'

Tamburlaine, I., Act III., Sc. 3.

(*Applied to a Man.*)

'Image of honour and nobility

In whose sweet person is comprised the sum
Of nature's skill and heavenly majesty.'

Tamburlaine, I., Act V., Sc. 2.

'Eternal Heaven sooner be dissolved,
And all that pierceth Phoebus' silver eye,
Before such hap fall to Zenocrate.'

Tamburlaine, I., Act III., Sc. 2.

'Thy garments shall be made of Median silk,
Enchased with precious jewels of mine own.'

Tamburlaine, I., Act I., Sc. 2.

'And Christian merchants that with Russian
stems

Plough up huge furrows in the Caspian Sea.'

Tamburlaine, I., Act I., Sc. 2.

'The terrene main.' *II., Act I., Sc. 1.*

'*Wagner.* Come hither, sirrah boy!

Robin. Boy! oh disgrace to my person!
Zounds, boy in your face! You have seen many
boys with beards, I am sure.'

Faustus, p. 12, ed. 1818.

With ravishing sounds of his melodious harp.'

Faustus, p. 20.

UNKNOWN AUTHOR.

'Now that the gloomy shadow of the night,
Longing to view Orion's drisling looks,
Leaps from th' antarctic world unto the sky,
And dims the welkin with *her* pitchy breath.'

Taming of a Shrew, p. 161, rep. 1779.

'Whose eyes are brighter than the lamps of
heaven,

Fairer than rocks of pearl and precious stone.'

P. 167.

(*Applied to a Woman.*)

'The image of honor and nobility,

In whose sweet person is comprised the summe
Of nature's skill and heavenly majesty!'

P. 169.

'Eternal Heaven sooner be dissolv'd,
And all that pierceth Phoebus' silver eye,
Before such hap befall to Polidor.'

P. 181.

'Thou shalt have garments wrought of Median
silk,

Enchas'd with precious jewels fetch'd from far.'

Pp. 183, 184.

'By Italian merchants, that with Russian stems
Plough up huge furrows in the terrene
main.'

P. 184.

'*Boy.* Come hither, sirra boy!

Sander. Boy! oh disgrace to my person!
Sounes, boy of your face! You have many boys
with such pickadenaunts, I am sure.'

P. 184.

'And ravishing sounds of his melodious harp.'

P. 200.

"In other passages the imitation is strong,
but not so direct; for example,

'Her sacred beauty hath enchanted heaven;
And, had she lived before the siege of Troy,
Helen (whose beauty summon'd Greece to
arms,

And drew a thousand ships to Tenedos)

Had not been named in Homer's Iliades.'

Tamburlaine, II., Act II., Sc. 2.

Whose sacred beauty hath enchanted me;

More fair than was the Grecian Helena,

For whose sweet sake so many princes died

That came with thousand ships to Tenedos.'

Taming of a Shrew, p. 169.

"The 'thousand ships' is a favourite allusion of Marlowe's. We have it again in 'Faustus.' It seems to have been in unison with his characteristic love of the magnificent."

The writer then proceeds to say, "Whatever view is taken of such glaring imitations, they may be well termed extraordinary. That an author should so closely repeat himself is at least unusual. That any one should so openly plagiarise from the works of a living writer universally known, and where detection would be certain, is next to incredible. Is not the latter hypothesis, also, rendered peculiarly improbable from the fact that the thefts are not from a single work, but are scattered over three distinct plays? Does it not appear more reasonable to suppose that the author of those three works should use a second time images *familiar* to his mind, than that another should to such an extent collect and appropriate them?"

"A point naturally suggested here is, 'Are there any repetitions, like those under consideration, in the acknowledged works of Marlowe?'—which I think may be answered in the affirmative. For, on very hastily running over them, a number have presented themselves, not, perhaps, so striking as those

by which they have to be paralleled, and yet sufficiently for the purpose." The passages subsequently quoted certainly bear out this assertion.

The writer then proceeds to show that the versification of this play, stiff and monotonous though it is, appears not to move so *slowly* as that of Greene; the poetical figures are poured out with a vehemence which he could not afford; and there is a glow, a voluptuous warmth, in the descriptions of female beauty, before which even the classical allusions (so cold in Greene) acquire something of life and heat. There are pictures of *wealth* also, which could scarcely have come from any one but the author of the 'Jew of Malta.' No dramatist that he remembers at all approaches Marlowe in such gorgeous passages. Further, there is scarcely a single classical reference in the 'Taming' which does not occur in 'Faustus' or 'Tamburlaine.' The only existing specimen we have of Marlowe's comic power is in 'Faustus.' The Sander and Boy of 'The Taming a Shrew' are pretty much a repetition of the Wagner and Robin of that play, from which indeed they borrow verbatim the commencement of a dialogue. Nor does the horse-play of the taming scenes appear out of Marlowe's reach. There is in them a violence done to 'the modesty of Nature,' a pandering to coarse taste, analogous in comedy to the monstrous rants and the bloody feasts which disfigure his tragic efforts. Attempt what he would, Marlowe's 'fiery soul' could not be restrained from 'working out its way.'

Do we, then, entirely agree with our correspondent that Marlowe was *the author* of 'The Taming of a Shrew,' in *every* sense? We do not go quite so far. We think that he has clearly made out that Marlowe has as good a title to the work as Greene—perhaps a better. Be it one or the other, they each belonged to the same school of poetry; Shakspeare created a new school. But there are passages and incidents in 'The Taming of a Shrew' which are unlike Marlowe—such as the scenes with Sly;—these are unlike Greene also;—they are fused more readily into Shakspeare's own materials, because they are natural. We now propose a second theory.

Was there not an older play than 'The Taming of a Shrew,' which furnished the main plot, some of the characters, and a small part of the dialogue, both to the author of 'The Taming of a Shrew' and the author of 'The Taming of the Shrew?' This play we may believe, without any violation of fact or probability, to have been used as the rude material for both authors to work upon. There was competition between them;—one produced a play for the Earl of Pembroke's servants,—the other for the Lord Chamberlain's servants,—out of some older play, much of which was probably improvised by the clowns, and whose main action, the discipline of the Shrew, would be irresistibly attractive to a rough audience, without the pompous declamation of the one remodeller, or the natural poetry or rich humour of the other. Whether the author or improver of the play printed in 1594 be Marlowe or Greene, there can be little question as to the characteristic superiority of Shakspeare's work. His was, perhaps, a more careful remodelling or recreation. In 'The Taming of a Shrew' it is not difficult to detect, especially in Sly and Sander, coarser things than belong either to Greene or Marlowe.

But there is a third theory,—that of Tieck—that 'The Taming of a Shrew' was a youthful work of Shakspeare himself. To our minds that play is totally different from the imagery and the versification of Shakspeare.

Shakspeare's undoubted play, 'The Taming of the Shrew,' was produced in a "taming" age. Men tamed each other by the axe and the fagot; parents tamed their children by the rod and the ferrule, as they stood or knelt in trembling silence before those who had given them life; and, although England was then called the "paradise of women," and, as opposed to the treatment of horses, they were treated "obsequiously," husbands thought that "taming," after the manner of Petrucio, by oaths and starvation, was a commendable fashion. Fletcher was somewhat heretical upon this point; for he wrote a play called 'The Tamer Tamed, or the Taming of the Tamer,' in which Petrucio, having married a second wife, was subjected to the same process by which he conquered

"Katharine the curst." The discipline appeared to be considered necessary for more than a century afterwards; for we find in 'The Tatler' a story, told as new and original, of a gentleman in Lincolnshire who had four daughters, one of whom was "so imperious a temper (usually called a high spirit), that it continually made great uneasiness in the family," but who was entirely reclaimed by the Petrucio recipe of "taking a woman down in her wedding shoes."

We are—the happier our fortune—living in an age when this practice of Petrucio is not universally considered orthodox; and we owe a great deal to him who has exhibited the secrets of the "taming school" with so much spirit in this comedy, for the better belief of our age, that violence is not to be subdued by violence. It was *he* who said, when the satirist cried out—

"Give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and
through
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world"—

it was *he* who said, in his own proper spirit of gentleness and truth,—

"Fie on thee! I can tell what thou wouldst
do—
Most mischievous foul sin in chiding sin."

It was *he* who found "a soul of goodness in things evil,"—who taught us, in the same delicious reflection of his own nature, the real secret of conquering opposition:—

"Your *gentleness* shall force,
More than your force move us to gentleness."*

Pardon be for him, if, treading in the footsteps of some predecessor whose sympathies with the peaceful and the beautiful were immeasurably inferior to his own, and sacrificing something to the popular appetite, he should have made the husband of a froward woman "kill her in her own humour," and bring her upon her knees to the abject obedience of a revolted but penitent slave:—

"A foul contending rebel,
And graceless traitor to her loving lord."

* 'As You Like It.'

Pardon for *him*? If there be one reader of Shakspeare, and especially if that reader be a female, who cherishes *unmixed* indignation when Petrucio, in his triumph, exclaims—

"He that knows better how to tame a shrew,
Now let him speak,"—

we would say,—the indignation which you feel, and in which thousands sympathize, belongs to the age in which you live; but the principle of justice, and of justice to women above all, from which it springs, has been established, more than by any other lessons of human origin, by him who has now moved your anger. It is to him that woman owes, more than to any other human authority, the popular elevation of the feminine character, by the most matchless delineations of its purity, its faith, its disinterestedness, its tenderness, its heroism, its union of intellect and sensibility. It is he that, as long as the power of influencing mankind by high thoughts, clothed in the most exquisite language, shall endure, will preserve the ideal elevation of women pure and unassailable from the attacks of coarseness or libertinism,—ay, and even from the degradation of the example of the crafty and worldly-minded of their own sex:—for it is he that has delineated the ingenuous and trusting Imogen, the guileless Perdita, the impassioned Juliet, the heart-stricken but loving Desdemona, the generous and courageous Portia, the unconquerable Isabella, the playful Rosalind, the world-unknowing Miranda. Shakspeare may have exhibited one froward woman wrongly tamed: but who can estimate the number of those from whom his all-penetrating influence has averted the curse of being froward?

If Shakspeare requires any apology for 'The Taming of the Shrew,' it is for having adopted the subject at all—not for his treatment of it. The Kate of the comedy to which this bears so much resemblance, upon the surface, is a thoroughly unfeminine person, coarse and obstreperous, without the humour which shines through the violence of Shakspeare's Katharine. He describes his Shrew

"Young and beauteous;
Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman."
She has a "scolding tongue," "her only

fault." Her temper, as Shakspeare has delineated it, is the result of her pride and her love of domination. She is captious to her father; she tyrannizes over her younger sister; she is jealous of the attractions of that sister's gentleness. This is a temper that perhaps could not be subdued by kindness, except after Petrucio's fashion of "killing a wife with kindness." At any rate, it could not be so subdued, except by a long course of patient discipline, quite incompatible with the hurried movement of a dramatic action. In the scene where Katharine strikes Bianca her temper has been exhibited at the worst. It is bad enough; but not quite so bad as appears from the following description of a French commentator:—"Catharine bat sa sœur par fantaisie et pour passer le temps, malgré les prières et les larmes de Bianca, qui ne se défend que par la douceur. Baptista accourt, et met Bianca en sureté dans sa chambre. Catharine sort, enragée de n'avoir plus personne à battre."* It is in her worst humour that Petrucio woos her; and surely nothing can be more animated than the wooing:—

"For you are call'd plain Kate,
And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst;

But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,
Kate of Kate-Hall, my super-dainty Kate,
For dainties are all cates; and therefore, Kate,
Take this of me, Kate of my consolation;—
Hearing thy mildness praised in every town,
Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded
(Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs),
Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife."

Mr. Brown† has very judiciously pointed out the conduct of this scene as an example of Shakspeare's intimate knowledge of Italian manners. The conclusion of it is in reality a betrothment; of which circumstance no indication is given in the other play. The imperturbable spirit of Petrucio, and the daring mixture of reality and jest in his deportment subdued Katharine at the first interview:—

"Setting all this chat aside,

* Paul Duport, 'Essais Littéraires,' tom. ii. p. 305.

† 'Shakspeare's Autobiographical Poems.'

Thus in plain terms:—Your father hath consented

That you shall be my wife;—your dowry 'greed on;

And will you, nill you, I will marry you."

Katharine denounces him as

"A madcap ruffian, and a swearing Jack;"

Petrucio heeds it not:—

"We have 'greed so well together,
That upon Sunday is the wedding-day."

Katharine rejoinds,—

"I'll see thee hang'd on Sunday first;"

but, nevertheless, the betrothment proceeds:—

"Give me thy hand, Kate: I will unto Venice,
To buy apparel 'gainst the wedding-day:—
Provide the feast, father, and bid the guests;
I will be sure my Katharine shall be fine.

Bap. I know not what to say: but give me your hands;

God send you joy, Petrucio! 't is a match.

Gre. Tra. Amen, say we; we will be witnesses."

"Father and Wife," says Petrucio. The betrothment is complete; and Katharine acknowledges it when Petrucio does not come to his appointment:—

"Now must the world point at poor Katharine,
And say—Lo! there is mad Petrucio's wife,
If it would please him come and marry her."

The "taming" has begun; her pride is touched in a right direction. But Petrucio *does* come. What passes in the church is matter of description, but the description is Shakspeare all over. When we compare the freedom and facility which our poet has thrown into these scenes with the drawling course of the other play which deals with the same incidents, we are amazed that any one should have a difficulty in distinctly tracing his "fine Roman hand." Nor are the scenes of the under-plot in our opinion less certainly his. Who but Shakspeare could have written these lines?—

"Tranio, I saw her coral lips to move,
And with her breath she did perfume the air;
Sacred and sweet was all I saw in her."

Compare this exquisite simplicity, this tender and unpretending harmony, with the bombastic images, and the formal rhythm, of the other play; the following passage, for example:—

“Come, fair Emelia, my lovely love,
Brighter than the burnish'd palace of the sun,
The eyesight of the glorious firmament,
In whose bright looks sparkles the radiant
fire

Wily Prometheus slyly stole from Jove.”

And who but Shakspeare could have created Grumio out of the materials which supplied the stupid *Sander* of ‘The Taming of a Shrew?’ That

“Ancient, trusty, pleasant, servant Grumio,”

is one of those incomparable characters who drove the old clowns and fools off the stage, and trampled their wooden daggers and cock-combs for ever under foot. He is one of that numerous train that Shakspeare called up, of whom Shadwell said that “they had more wit than any of the wits and critics of his time.” When Grumio comes with Petrucio to wed, he says not a word; but who has not pictured him “with a linen stock on one leg, and a kersey boot-hose on the other—a very monster in apparel; and not like a Christian footboy, or a gentleman’s lackey?” We imagine him, like Sancho or Ralpho, somewhat under-sized. His profound remark, “considering the weather, a taller man than I would take cold,” is indicative equally of his stature and his wit. In the scene with Curtis, in the fourth act, he is almost as good as Launce and Touchstone.

But we are digressing from Petrucio, the soul of this drama. Hazlitt’s character of him is very just:—“Petrucio is a madman in his senses; a very honest fellow, who hardly speaks a word of truth, and succeeds in all his tricks and impostures. He acts his assumed character to the life, with the most fantastical extravagance, with complete presence of mind, with untired animal spirits, and without a particle of ill-humour from beginning to end.” The great skill which Shakspeare has shown in the management of this comedy is established in the conviction which he produces all along that

Petrucio’s character is *assumed*. Whatever he may say, whatever he may do, we are satisfied that he has a real fund of good humour at the bottom of all the outbreaks of his inordinate self-will. We know that, if he succeeds in subduing the violence of his wife by a much higher extravagance of violence, he will be prepared not only to return her affection, but to evoke it, in all the strength and purity of woman’s love, out of the pride and obstinacy in which it has been buried. His concluding line,

“Why, there’s a wench!—Come on, and kiss me, Kate,”

is an earnest of his happiness.

Of the ‘Induction’ we scarcely know how to speak without appearing hyperbolical in our praise. It is to us one of the most precious gems in Shakspeare’s casket. The elegance, the truth, the high poetry, the consummate humour, of this fragment are so remarkable, that, if we apply ourselves to compare it carefully with the Induction of the other play, and with the best of the dramatic poetry of his contemporaries, we shall in some degree obtain a conception, not only of the qualities in which he equalled and excelled the highest things of other men, and in which he could be measured with them, but of those wonderful endowments in which he differed from all other men, and to which no standard of comparison can be applied. Schlegel says, “The last half of this prelude, that in which the tinker in his new state again drinks himself out of his senses, and is transformed in his sleep into his former condition, from some accident or other is lost.” We doubt whether it was ever produced; and whether Shakspeare did not exhibit his usual judgment in letting the curtain drop upon honest Christopher, when his wish was accomplished at the close of the comedy which he had expressed very early in its progress:—

“’T is a very excellent piece of work, madam lady; ‘Would ’t were done!’”

Had Shakspeare brought him again upon the scene, in all the richness of his first exhibi-

tion, perhaps the impatience of the audience would never have allowed them to sit through the lessons of "the taming-school." We have had farces enough *founded* upon the legend of Christopher Sly, but no one has

ventured to *continue* him. Neither this fragment, nor that of "Cambuscan bold," could be made perfect, unless we could

"Call up him that left half told
The story."

BOOK IV.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Dramas of Shakspeare are in no particular more remarkable than in the almost complete absence of any allusion to their author—any reference to his merely personal thoughts and circumstances—any intimation, that might naturally enough have been conveyed in Prologue or Epilogue, of the relations in which the Poet stood with regard to his audience. There are only ten of his plays in which any one of the characters, at the conclusion, comes forward as an actor to deprecate censure or solicit applause. There are only two out of these ten plays in which the *Author*, through the actor, directly addresses the spectators. In the Epilogue to 'The Second Part of Henry IV.' the Dancer says, in a light manner, "Our humble Author will continue the story." In the concluding Chorus to 'Henry V.,' the Poet, then in the very zenith of his popularity, addresses himself to the audience, of course through the actor, more seriously and emphatically:—

"Thus far, with rough and all unable pen,
Our bending author hath pursued the story;
In little room confining mighty men,
Mangling by starts the full course of their
glory.
Small time, but in that small most greatly
lived
This star of England: fortune made his
sword
By which the world's best garden he achieved,
And of it left his son imperial lord.

Henry the sixth, in infant bands crown'd king
Of France and England, did this king suc-
ceed;

Whose state so many had the managing,
That they lost France, and made his Eng-
land bleed:

Which oft our stage hath shown; and for
their sake,

In your fair minds let this acceptance take."

"The story" which the author "hath pursued thus far" is the story which began with the deposition of Richard II. The story of the triumphant progress of the house of Lancaster, up to the period when the son of Bolingbroke had "achieved the world's best garden," had been told by the poet in four dramas, of which 'Henry V.' was the concluding one. These dramas had been linked together with the most scrupulous care, so that, although for the purposes of representation there were necessarily distinct pauses in the action, they were essentially one great drama. They were written, it is highly probable, almost consecutively; for not only does the external evidence show that they were given to the world during the last three years of the sixteenth century, but their whole dramatic construction, as well as their peculiarities of style, determine them to belong to one and the same period of the poet's life, when his genius grasped a subject with the full consciousness of power, and revelled in its own luxuriance, whether of wit or

fancy, without timidity. But there was another great division of the story, which had been previously told. As the glories of the house of Lancaster, consummated in the victory of Agincourt, had been traced through these four great dramas, so the ruin of the house of Lancaster, and all the terrible consequences of the struggles between that house and the other branch of the Plantagenets, even up to the final termination of the struggle at the field of Bosworth, had been developed in four other dramas of an earlier date:—

“Henry the sixth, in infant bands crown’d king
Of France and England, did this king succeed;

Whose state so many had the managing,
That they lost France, and made his England bleed:

Which oft our stage hath shown.”

Of this other series of dramas thus described—the second in the order of events, the first in the order of their composition and performance—“the bending author” in his Chorus to ‘Henry V.’ makes no equivocal mention. The events which “lost France” and made “England bleed” had the “stage” of Shakspeare often “shown,” in dramas which had long been familiar to his audience, and were unquestionably in the highest degree popular. As early as 1592 Thomas Nashe thus writes:—“How would it have joyed brave Talbot, the terror of the French, to think that after he had lain two hundred years in his tomb he should triumph again on the stage; and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at least (at several times), who, in the tragedian that represents his person, behold him fresh bleeding!”* In 1596, when Ben Jonson produced his ‘Every Man in his Humour,’ he accompanied it with a Prologue†, levelled against what appeared to him the absurdities of the romantic drama, in which is this passage:—

* ‘Pierce Pennilesse his Supplication to the Devil.’

† Gifford has clearly demonstrated that the Prologue appeared originally with Jonson’s first comedy, and was not appended long afterwards, as the commentators have supposed, for the sake of sneering at Shakspeare’s later dramas.

“With three rusty swords,
And help of some few foot and half-foot words‡,
Fight over York and Lancaster’s long jars,
And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars.”

That the play in which the brave Talbot triumphed “again on the stage” was what we call ‘The First Part of Henry VI.,’ there can be no reasonable doubt; that what we call the Second and Third Parts of ‘Henry VI.,’ and perhaps ‘Richard III.,’ were those in which were fought over “York and Lancaster’s long jars,” is equally clear. Shakspeare, as it appears to us, does not hesitate to adopt this series of plays as his own. The author of ‘Henry V.’ asks that the success of these earlier dramas should commend his later play to a favourable reception:—

“For their sake,
In your fair minds let *this* acceptance take.”

For a critical study of the plays of Shakspeare there is an important advantage in tracing the growth of his powers through the probable order in which his dramas were produced. Following out this principle strictly, we should treat of ‘Henry VI.’ and ‘Richard III.’ before ‘Richard II.,’ ‘Henry IV.,’ and ‘Henry V.’ But, on the other hand, we may consider this series of eight plays as the development of a great idea of dramatic unity, conceived, it may be, by the poet in his earliest period, although produced in detached portions, and not grouped into one “story” till ‘Henry V.’ completed the series. The circumstances which suggested “the story” would naturally arise out of his youthful position. The “story” of the Wars of the Roses was presented to him with ancestral and local associations. When Shakspeare was about five years of age, a grant of arms was made by the College of Heralds to his father. The father was unquestionably engaged in business of some sort in Stratford-upon-Avon; he was an agriculturist, in all likelihood; but he lived in an age when the pride of ancestry was not lightly regarded, and when a distinction such as this was of real and per-

‡ Jonson, in another place, has translated the “*sesquipedalia verba*,” by this phrase.

manent importance. The grant was confirmed in 1599; and the reason for the confirmation of arms is stated with minute particularity in the "exemplification" then granted by Sir William Dethick and the great Camden:—"Know ye that in all nations and kingdoms the record and remembrance of the valiant facts and virtuous dispositions of worthy men have been known and divulged by certain shields of arms and tokens of chivalry; the grant and testimony whereof appertaineth unto us, by virtue of our offices from the queen's most excellent majesty and her highness' most noble and victorious progenitors; wherefore, being solicited, and by credible report informed that John Shakspeare, now of Stratford-upon-Avon, in the county of Warwick, gent., whose parent and great-grandfather, late antecessor, for his faithful and approved service to the late most prudent prince King Henry VII. of famous memory, was advanced and rewarded with lands and tenements, given to him in these parts of Warwickshire, where they have continued by some descents in good reputation and credit," &c., &c. It is not difficult to imagine the youthful Shakspeare sitting at his mother's feet, to listen to the tale of his "antecessor's" prowess; or to picture the boy led by his father over the field of Bosworth—to be shown the great morass which lay between both armies—and Radmoor Plain, where the battle began—and Dickon's Nook, where the tyrant harangued his army—and the village of Dadlington, where the graves of the slain still indented the ground. Here was the scene of his antecessor's "faithful and approved service." In the humble house of Shakspeare's boyhood there was, in all probability, to be

found a thick squat folio volume, then some thirty years printed, in which might be read, "what misery, what murder, and what execrable plagues this famous region hath suffered by the division and dissention of the renowned houses of Lancaster and York." This, to the generation of Shakspeare's boyhood, was not a tale buried in the dust of ages; it was one whose traditions were familiar to the humblest of the land, whilst the memory of its bitter hatreds still ruffled the spirits of the highest. "For what nobleman liveth at this day, or what gentleman of any ancient stock or progeny is clear, whose lineage hath not been infested and plagued with this unnatural division?" In that old volume from which we quote, "the names of the histories contained" are thus set forth:—"I. 'The *Unquiet Time* of King Henry the Fourth.' II. 'The *Victorious Acts* of King Henry the Fifth.' III. 'The *Troublous Season* of King Henry the Sixth.' IV. 'The *Prosperous Reign* of King Edward the Fourth.' V. 'The *Pitiful Life* of King Edward the Fifth.' VI. 'The *Tragical Doings* of King Richard the Third.' VII. The *Politic Governance* of King Henry the Seventh.' VIII. 'The *Triumphant Reign* of King Henry the Eighth.'" This book was Hall's 'Chronicle.'

The subject, then, of this division of our 'Studies' will be Shakspeare's Dramatic Chronicle "of the two noble and illustrious families of Lancaster and York, being long in continual dissention for the Crown of this realm,"—the 'Chronicle,' which commences with the banishment of Bolingbroke by Richard II., and ends with the overthrow of the descendant of "the first author of the division" on the field of Bosworth.

CHAPTER I.

KING RICHARD II.

THE Richard II. of Shakspeare is the Richard II. of real history.

But there is a question whether, as the foundation of this drama, Shakspeare worked upon any previous play. No copy of any such play exists. The character of Richard is so entire—so thoroughly a whole—that we can have little doubt in believing it to be a creation, and not a character adapted to the received dramatic notions of the poet's audience. But still there is every reason to suppose that there was another play of 'Richard II.'—perhaps two others; and that one held possession of the stage long after Shakspeare's exquisite production had been acted and published. There is a curious matter connected with the state history of Shakspeare's own times that has regard to the performance of *some* play of 'Richard II.' On the afternoon previous to the insurrection of the Earl of Essex, in February, 1601, Sir Gilly Merrick, one of his partisans, procured to be acted before a great company of those who were engaged in the conspiracy, "the play of deposing Richard II." The official pamphlet of the declarations of the treasons of the Earl of Essex states that, when it was told Merrick, "by one of the players, that the play was old, and they should have loss in playing it, because few would come to it, there was forty shillings extraordinary given to play it; and so, thereupon, played it was." In the printed account of the arraignment of Merrick, it is said that he ordered this play "to satisfy his eyes with a sight of that tragedy which he thought soon after his lord should bring from the stage to the state." There is a passage in Camden's 'Annals' which would appear to place it beyond a doubt that the play so acted was an older play than that of Shakspeare. It is there charged against Essex that he procured, by money, the obsolete tragedy (*exoletam tragœdiam*) of the abdication of Richard II. to be acted in a public theatre before the

conspiracy. Bacon hints at a systematic purpose of bringing Richard II. "upon the stage and into print in Queen Elizabeth's time." Elizabeth herself, in a conversation with Lambarde, the historian of Kent, and keeper of the Records in the Tower, going over a pandect of the Rolls which Lambarde had prepared, coming to the reign of Richard II., said, "I am Richard II., know ye not that?" Any allusion to Richard II. at that time was the cause of great jealousy. Haywarde, in 1599, very narrowly escaped a state prosecution for his 'First Part of the Life and Reign of King Henry IV.' This book was the deposition of Richard II. put "into print," to which Bacon alludes. It appears to us that, without further evidence, there can be no doubt that the play acted before the partisans of the Earl of Essex was not the play of Shakspeare. The deposition scene, as we know by the title-page, professed to be added to the edition of 1608. The play which Merrick ordered was, in 1601, called an obsolete play. Further, would Shakspeare have continued in favour with Elizabeth, had he been the author of a play whose performance gave such deep offence?

But we have now further evidence that there was an old play of 'Richard II.,' which essentially differed from Shakspeare's play. Mr. Collier, whose researches have thrown so much light upon the stage in general, and upon Shakspeare's life in particular, has published some very curious extracts from a manuscript in the Bodleian Library, which describe, from the observations of a playgoer in the time of James I., a play of 'Richard II.,' essentially different in its scenes from the play of Shakspeare. Dr. Symon Forman, who was a sort of quack and astrologer, and who, being implicated in the conspiracy to murder Sir Thomas Overbury, had escaped public accusation by suddenly dying in 1611, kept "a book of plays and notes thereof, for common policy;" by which

"common policy" he means—for maxims of prudence. His first entry is entitled "in Richard II., at the Globe, 1611, the 30 of April, Thursday." From the extract which we shall take the liberty of giving from Mr. Collier's book, it will be seen that at Shakspeare's own theatre, the Globe, a 'Richard II.' was performed, which was, unquestionably, not his 'Richard II.'

"Remember therein how Jack Straw, by his overmuch boldness, not being politic nor suspecting anything, was suddenly, at Smithfield Bars, stabbed by Walworth, the Mayor of London, and so he and his whole army was overthrown. Therefore, in such case, or the like, never admit any party without a bar between, for a man cannot be too wise, nor keep himself too safe.

"Also remember how the Duke of Gloucester, the Earl of Arundel, Oxford, and others, crossing the King in his humour about the Duke of Erland (Ireland) and Bushy, were glad to fly and raise a host of men; and, being in his castle, how the Duke of Erland came by night to betray him, with three hundred men; but, having privy warning thereof, kept his gates fast, and would not suffer the enemy to enter, which went back again with a fly in his ear, and after was slain by the Earl of Arundel in the battle.

"Remember, also, when the Duke (*i. e.* of Gloucester) and Arundel came to London with their army, King Richard came forth to them, and met them, and gave them fair words, and promised them pardon, and that all should be well, if they would discharge their army: upon whose promises and fair speeches they did it; and after, the King bid them all to a banquet, and so betrayed them and cut off their heads, &c., because they had not his pardon under his hand and seal before, but his word.

"Remember therein, also, how the Duke of Lancaster privily contrived all villainy to set them all together by the ears, and to make the nobility to envy the King, and mislike him and his government; by which means he made his own son king, which was Henry Bolingbroke.

"Remember, also, how the Duke of Lancaster asked a wise man whether himself should ever be king, and he told him no, but his son should be a king: and when he had told him, he hanged him up for his labour, because he should not bruit abroad, or speak thereof to others.

This was a policy in the commonwealth's opinion, but I say it was a villain's part, and a Judas' kiss, to hang the man for telling him the truth. Beware, by this example, of noblemen and their fair words, and say little to them, lest they do the like to thee for thy good will." *

From Forman's account of this play it will be seen that it embraces the earlier period of Richard II., containing the insurrection of Jack Straw. It seems very doubtful whether it includes the close of the reign. We have a talk for "policy" about the Duke of Lancaster's (Gaunt's) machinations; but nothing about Henry Bolingbroke. Were there *two* plays of 'Richard II.' of which we know nothing—the *obsolete* play of the deposition, which Merrick caused to be acted in 1601, and the play containing Jack Straw, which Forman noted in 1611?

We scarcely know how to approach this drama, even for the purpose of a simple analysis. We are almost afraid to trust our own admiration when we turn to the cold criticism by which opinion in this country has been wont to be governed. We have been told that it cannot "be said much to affect the passions or enlarge the understanding."† It may be so. And yet, we think, it might somewhat "affect the passions," for "gorgeous tragedy" hath here put on her "scepter'd pall," and if she bring not Terror in her train, Pity, at least, claims the sad story for her own. And yet it may somewhat "enlarge the understanding,"—for, though it abound not in those sententious moralities which may fitly adorn "a theme at school," it lays bare more than one human bosom with a most searching anatomy; and, in the moral and intellectual strength and weakness of humanity, which it discloses with as much precision as the scalpel reveals to the student of our physical nature the symptoms of health or disease, may we read the proximate and final causes of this world's success or loss, safety or danger, honour or disgrace, elevation or ruin. And then, moreover, the profound truths

* 'New Particulars regarding the Works of Shakspeare:' 1836.

† Johnson.

which, half hidden to the careless reader, are to be drawn out from this drama, are contained in such a splendid framework of the picturesque and the poetical, that the setting of the jewel almost distracts our attention from the jewel itself. We are here plunged into the midst of the fierce passions and the gorgeous pageantries of the antique time. We not only enter the halls and galleries, where is hung

“Armoury of the invincible knights of old,”

but we see the beaver closed, and the spear in rest:—under those cuirasses are hearts knocking against the steel with almost more than mortal rage;—the banners wave, the trumpet sounds—heralds and marshals are ready to salute the victor—but the absolute king casts down his warder, and the anticipated triumph of one proud champion must end in the unmerited disgrace of both. The transition is easy from the tourney to the battle-field. A nation must bleed that a subject may be avenged. A crown is to be played for, though

“Tumultuous wars

Shall kin with kin and kind with kind confound.”

The luxurious lord,

“That every day under his household roof
Did keep ten thousand men,”

perishes in a dungeon;—the crafty usurper sits upon his throne, but it is undermined by the hatreds even of those who placed him on it. Here is, indeed, “a kingdom for a stage.” And has the greatest of poets dealt with such a subject without affecting the passions or enlarging the understanding? No, no. Away with this. We *will* trust our own admiration.

It is a sincere pleasure to us to introduce our remarks upon the ‘Richard II.’ by some acute and just observations upon Shakspeare’s historical plays in general from a French source. The following passage is from the forty-ninth volume of the ‘Dictionnaire de la Conversation et de la Lecture.’ (Paris, 1838.) The article bears the signature of Philarète Chasles:—

“This poet, so often sneered at as a frantic

and barbarous writer, is, above all, remarkable for a judgment so high, so firm, so uncompromising, that one is almost tempted to impeach his coldness, and to find in this impassible observer something that may be almost called cruel towards the human race. In the historical pieces of Shakspeare, the picturesque, rapid, and vehement genius which has produced them seems to bow before the superior law of a judgment almost ironical in its clear-sightedness. Sensibility to impressions, the ardent force of imagination, the eloquence of passion—these brilliant gifts of nature, which would seem destined to draw a poet beyond all limits, are subordinated in this extraordinary intelligence to a calm and almost deriding sagacity, which pardons nothing and forgets nothing. Thus, the dramas of which we speak are painful as real history. Æschylus exhibits to us Fate hovering over the world; Calderon opens to us heaven and hell as the last words of the enigma of life; Voltaire renders his drama an instrument for asserting his own peculiar doctrines;—but Shakspeare seeks *his* Fate in the hearts of men, and when he makes us see them so capricious, so bewildered, so irresolute, he teaches us to contemplate, without surprise the untoward events and sudden changes of fortune. In the purely poetical dramas to which this great poet has given so much verisimilitude, we console ourselves in believing that the evils which he paints are imaginary, and that their truth is but general. But the dramatic chronicles which Shakspeare has sketched are altogether real. There we behold irrevocable evils—we see the scenes that the world has seen, and the horrors that it has suffered. The more the details that accompany these events are irresistible in their truth, the more they grieve us. The more the author is impartial, the more he wounds and overpowers us. This employment of his marvellous talent is in reality a profound satire upon what we are, upon what we shall be, upon what we were.”

It is this wonderful subjection of the poetical power to the higher law of truth—to the poetical truth, which is the highest truth, comprehending and expounding the

historical truth—which must furnish the clue to the proper understanding of the drama of ‘Richard II.’ It appears to us that, when the poet first undertook

“to ope
The purple testament of bleeding war,”—

to unfold the roll of the causes and consequences of that usurpation of the house of Lancaster which plunged three or four generations of Englishmen in bloodshed and misery—he approached the subject with an inflexibility of purpose as totally removed as it was possible to be from the levity of a partisan. There were to be weighed in one scale the follies, the weaknesses, the crimes of Richard—the injuries of Bolingbroke—the insults which the capricious despotism of the king had heaped upon his nobles—the exactions under which the people groaned—the real merits and the popular attributes of him who came to redress and to repair. In the other scale were to be placed the afflictions of fallen greatness—the revenge and treachery by which the fall was produced—the heartburnings and suspicions which accompany every great revolution—the struggles for power which ensue when the established and legitimate authority is thrust from its seat. All these phases, personal and political, of a deposition and an usurpation, Shakspeare has exhibited with that marvellous impartiality which the French writer whom we have quoted has well described. The political impartiality is so remarkable, that, during the time of Elizabeth, the deposition scene was neither acted nor printed, lest it should give occasion to the enemies of legitimate succession to find examples for the deposing of a monarch. Going forward into the spirit of another age, during the administration of Walpole, the play, in 1738, had an unusual success, principally because it contained many passages which seemed to point to the then supposed corruption of the court; and, on this occasion, a letter published in ‘The Craftsman,’ in which many lines of the play were thus applied to the political topics of the times, was the subject of state prosecution. The statesmen of Elizabeth and of

George II. were thus equally in fear of the popular tendencies of this history. On the other hand, when Richard, speaking dramatically in his own person, says,—

“Not all the water in the rough rude sea
Can wash the balm from an anointed king:
The breath of worldly men cannot depose
The deputy elected by the Lord;”—

Dr. Johnson rejoicingly says,—“Here is the doctrine of indefeasible right expressed in the strongest terms; but our poet did not learn it in the reign of James, to which it is now the practice of all writers whose opinions are regulated by fashion or interest to impute the original of every tenet which they have been taught to think false or foolish.” Again, when the Bishop of Carlisle, in the deposition scene, exclaims,

“And shall the figure of God’s majesty,
His captain, steward, deputy elect,
Anointed, crowned, planted many years,
Be judged by subject and inferior breath,
And he himself not present?”—

Johnson remarks, “Here is another proof that our author did not learn in King James’s court *HIS elevated notions of the right of kings*. I know not any flatterer of the Stuarts who has expressed this doctrine in much stronger terms.” Steevens adds that Shakspeare found the speech in Holinshed, and that “the politics of the historian were the politics of the poet.” The contrary aspects which this play has thus presented to those who were political partisans is a most remarkable testimony to Shakspeare’s political impartiality. He appears to us as if he, “apart, sat on a hill retired,” elevated far above the temporary opinions of his own age, or of succeeding ages. His business is with universal humanity, and not with a fragment of it. He is, indeed, the poet of a nation in his glowing and genial patriotism, but never the poet of a party. Perhaps, the most eloquent speech in this play is that of Gaunt, beginning—

“This royal throne of kings, this scepter’d isle.”

It is full of such praise of our country as, taken apart from the conclusion, might too much foster the pride of a proud nation.

But the profound impartiality of the master-mind comes in at the close of this splendid description, to show us that all these glories must be founded upon just government.

It is in the same lofty spirit of impartiality which governs the general sentiments of this drama that Shakspeare has conceived the mixed character of Richard. Sir Joshua Reynolds, in his admirable 'Discourses' (a series of compositions which present the example of high criticism upon the art of painting, when the true principles of criticism upon poetry were neglected or misunderstood), has properly reprobated "the difficulty as well as danger in an endeavour to concentrate in a single subject those various powers, which, rising from different points, naturally move in different directions." He says, with reference to this subject, "Art has its boundaries, though imagination has none." Here is the great line of distinction between poetry and painting. Painting must concentrate all its power upon the representation of one action, one expression, in the same person. The range of poetry is as boundless as the diversities of character in the same individual. Sir Joshua Reynolds has, however, properly laughed at those principles of criticism which would even limit the narrow range of pictorial expression to conventional, and therefore hackneyed, forms. He quotes a passage from Du Piles, as an example of the attempt of a false school of criticism to substitute the "pompous and laboured insolence of grandeur" for that dignity which, "seeming to be natural and inherent, draws spontaneous reverence." "If you draw persons of high character and dignity" (says Du Piles), "they ought to be drawn in such an attitude that the portraits must seem to speak to us of themselves, and as it were to say to us, 'Stop, take notice of me; I am that invincible king, surrounded by majesty:' 'I am that valiant commander who struck terror everywhere:' 'I am that great minister who knew all the springs of politics:' 'I am that magistrate of consummate wisdom and probity.'" Now, this is absurd enough as regards the painter; but, absurd as it is, in its limited application, it is precisely the same

sort of reasoning that the French critics in the time of Voltaire, and the English who caught the infection of their school, applied to the higher range of the art of Shakspeare. The criticism of Dr. Johnson, for example, upon the *character* of Richard II. is, for the most part, a series of such mistakes. He misinterprets Shakspeare's delineation of Richard, upon a preconceived theory of his own. Thus he says, in a note to the second scene in the third act, where Richard for a moment appears resigned

"To bear the tidings of calamity,"

"It seems to be the design of the poet to raise Richard to esteem in his fall, and, consequently, to interest the reader in his favour. He gives him only *passive fortitude*, the virtue of a confessor rather than of a king. In his prosperity we saw him imperious and oppressive; but in his distress he is wise, patient, and pious." Now this is precisely the reverse of Shakspeare's representation of Richard. Instead of passive fortitude, we have passionate weakness; and it is that very weakness upon which our pity is founded. Having mistaken Shakspeare's purpose in the delineation of Richard in his fall, this able but sometimes prejudiced writer flounders on in a series of carping objections to the language which Richard uses. After Richard has said,

"Or I'll be buried in the king's highway,
Some way of common trade, where subjects'
feet
May hourly trample on their sovereign's head,"

he flies off into a series of pretty imaginings, and ends thus,—

"Well, well, I see
I talk but idly, and you mock at me."

Now in nothing is the exquisite tact of the poet more shown than in these riots of the imagination in the unhappy king, whose mind was altogether prostrate before the cool and calculating intellect of Bolingbroke. But Johnson, quite in Du Piles' style, here says, "Shakspeare is very apt to deviate from the pathetic to the ridiculous. Had the speech of Richard ended at this line ('May hourly trample on their sovereign's head'),

it had exhibited the natural language of submissive misery, conforming its intention to the present fortune, and calmly ending its purposes in death." Now, it is most certain that Shakspeare had no intention to exhibit "the natural language of submissive misery." Such a purpose would have been utterly foreign to the great ideal truth of his conception of Richard's character. Again, in the interview with the queen, when Richard says,—

"Tell thou the lamentable fall of me,
And send the hearers weeping to their beds.
For why, the senseless brands will sympathize," &c.,—

Johnson observes, "The poet should have ended this speech with the foregoing line, and have spared his childish prattle about the fire." Mr. Monck Mason very innocently remarks upon this comment of Johnson, "This is certainly childish prattle, but it is of the same stamp with the other speeches of Richard after the landing of Bolingbroke, which are a strange medley of sense and puerility." Of course they are so. There are, probably, no passages of criticism upon Shakspeare that more forcibly point out to us, than these of Johnson and his followers do, the absurdity of trying a poet by laws which he had of purpose cast off and spurned. Had Johnson been applying his test of excellence to the conventional kings and heroes of the French stage, and of the English stage of his own day, he might have been nearer the truth. But Shakspeare undertook to show us, not only a fallen king, but a fallen man. Richard stands before us in the nakedness of humanity, stripped of the artificial power which made his strength. The props are cut away upon which he leaned. He is,

"in shape and mind,
Transform'd and weaken'd,"—

humbled to the lot of the commonest slave,
to

"feel want, taste grief,
Need friends."

This is the Richard of our poet. Is it not

the Richard of history? We must trespass upon the patience of the reader while we run through the play, that we may properly note the dependence of its events upon its characters.

Froissart has given us the key to two of the most remarkable and seemingly opposite traits of Richard's mind,—cunning and credulity. Speaking of his devising the death of his uncle of Gloster, Froissart says, "King Richard of England noted well these said words, the which was showed him in secret-ness; and, *like an imaginative prince as he was*, within a season after that his uncles of Lancaster and of York were departed out of the court, then the king took more hardiness on him." Lord Berners, the translator of Froissart, always uses "imaginative" in the sense of deviceful, crafty,—following his original. As to the king's credulity, the same accurate observer, who knew the characters of his own days well, thus speaks:—"King Richard of England had a condition that, if he loved a man, he would make him so great, and so near him, that it was marvel to consider, and no man durst speak to the contrary; and also *he would lightly believe sooner than any other king of remembrance before him*." Upon these historical truths is Shakspeare's Richard, in the first scenes of this drama,—the absolute Richard,—founded. But with what skill has Shakspeare indicated the evil parts of Richard's character—just as much as, and no more than, is sufficient to qualify our pity for his fall. We learn from Gaunt that Richard was the real cause of Gloster's death;—the matter is once mentioned, and there an end. We ourselves see his arbitrary bearing in the banishment of Bolingbroke and Norfolk; his moral cowardice in requiring an oath for his own safety from the two enemies that he was at that moment oppressing; his meanness in taunting Gaunt with his "party-verdict" as to his son's banishment; his levity in mitigating the sentence after it had been solemnly delivered. After this scene we have an exhibition of his cold-hearted rapacity in wishing for the death of Gaunt:—

"Now put it, Heaven, in his physician's mind
To help him to his grave immediately!

The lining of his coffers shall make coats
To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars."

This prepares us for the just reproaches of his dying uncle in the next act ;—when the dissembling king is moved from his craft to an exhibition of childish passion toward the stern but now powerless Gaunt, before whom he had trembled till he saw him on a death-bed. The

"make pale our cheek"

was not a random expression. The king again speaks in this way when he hears of the defection of the Welsh under Salisbury :—

"Have I not reason to look pale and dead?"

Richard, who was of a ruddy complexion, exhibited in his cheeks the internal workings of fear or rage. This was a part of his weakness of character. The writer of the 'Metrical History'* twice notices the peculiarity. When the king received a defying message from the Irish chieftain, the French knight, who was present, says, "This speech was not agreeable to the king ; it appeared to me that his face grew pale with anger." When he heard of the landing of Bolingbroke, the writer again says, "It seemed to me that the king's face at this turned pale with anger." Richard's indignation at the reproaches of Gaunt is, at once, brutal and childish :—

"And let them die, that age and sullens have."

Then comes the final act of despotism, which was to be his ruin :—

"We do seize to us

The plate, coin, revenues, and moveables,
Whereof our uncle Gaunt did stand possess'd."

He is amazed that York is indignant at this outrage. He is deaf to the prophetic denunciation,

"You pluck a thousand dangers on your head."

Still, Shakspeare keeps us from the point to which he might have led us, of unmitigated

* 'Histoire du Roy d'Angleterre Richard,' &c. Of this most curious Poem, written by a French gentleman who was with Richard in Ireland, and bearing the date of 1399, there is an admirable translation in the 20th Volume of the 'Archæologia.'

contempt towards Richard ;—to make us hate him was no part of his purpose. We know that the charges of the discontented nobles against him are just ; we almost wish success to their enterprise ; but we are most skilfully held back from discovering so much of Richard's character as would have disqualified us from sympathising in his fall. It is highly probable, too, that Shakspeare abstained from painting the actual king as an object to be despised, while he stood as "the symbolic, or representative, on which all genial law no less than patriotism, depends."* The poet does not hesitate, when the time is past for reverencing the king or compassionating the man, to speak of Richard, by the mouth of Henry IV., with that contempt which his weakness and his frivolities would naturally excite :—

"The skipping king, he ambled up and down
With shallow jesters and rash bavin wits,
Soon kindled and soon burn'd : carded his
state ;
Mingled his royalty with carping fools ;
Had his great name profaned with their
scorns ;
And gave his countenance, against his name,
To laugh at gibing boys," &c.

('Henry IV.,' Part I.)

There is nothing of this bitter satire put in the mouths of any of the speakers 'in Richard II. ;' and the poetical reason for this appears obvious. Yet it is perfectly true, historically, that Richard "carded his state" by indiscriminately mixing with all sorts of favourites, who used the most degrading freedoms towards him.

Bolingbroke (then Henry IV.) thus describes himself to his son :—

"And then I stole all courtesy from heaven,
And dress'd myself in such humility,
That I did pluck allegiance from men's hearts,
Loud shouts and salutations from their mouths,
Even in the presence of the crowned king."

The Bolingbroke who, in 'Henry IV.,' is thus retrospectively painted, is the Bolingbroke in action in 'Richard II.' The king

"Observed his courtship to the common people."

* Coleridge.

When he returns from banishment, in arms against his unjust lord, he wins Northumberland by his powers of pleasing :—

“And yet our fair discourse hath been as sugar.”

Mark, too, his professions to the “gentle Percy :”—

“I count myself in nothing else so happy,
As in a soul remembering my good friends.”

When York accuses him of

“Gross rebellion and detested treason,”

how temperate, and yet how convincing, is his defence. York remains with him—he “cannot mend it.” But Bolingbroke, with all his humility to his uncle, and all his courtesy to his friends, abates not a jot of his determination to be supreme. He announces this in no under-tones—he has no confidences about his ultimate intentions ;—but we feel that he has determined to sit on the throne, even while he says,

“I am a subject,
And challenge law.”

He is, in fact, the king, when he consigns Bushy and Green to the scaffold. He speaks not as one of a council—he neither vindicates nor alludes to his authority. He addresses the victims as the one interpreter of the law ; and he especially dwells upon his own personal wrongs :—

“See them deliver’d over
To execution and the hand of death.”

Most skilfully does this violent and uncompromising exertion of authority prepare us for what is to come.

We are arrived at those wonderful scenes which, to our minds, may be classed amongst the very highest creations of art—even of the art of Shakspeare. “Barkloughly Castle” is “at hand.”—Richard stands upon his “kingdom once again.” Around him are armed bands ready to strip him of his crown and life. Does he step upon his “earth” with the self-confiding port of one who will hold it against all foes ? The conventional dignity of the king cannot conceal the intellectual weakness of the man : and we see that he must lose his “gentle earth” for

ever. His sensibility—his plastic imagination—his effeminacy, even when strongly moved to love or to hatred—his reliance upon his office more than his own head and heart—doom him to an overthrow. How surpassingly characteristic are the lines in which he addresses his “earth” as if it were a thing of life—a favourite that he could honour and cherish—a friend that would adopt and cling to his cause—a partisan that could throw a shield over him, and defend him from his enemies :—

“So, weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favour with my royal hands.—
Feed not thy sovereign’s foe, my gentle earth,” &c.

He feels that this is a “senseless conjuration ;” but when Aumerle ventures to say, “we are too remiss,” he reproaches his “discomfortable cousin,” by pointing out to him the heavenly aid that a king might expect. His is not the holy confidence of a high-minded chieftain, nor the pious submission of a humble believer. He, indeed, says,—

“For every man that Bolingbroke hath press’d
To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
God, for his Richard, hath in heavenly pay
A glorious angel.”

But when Salisbury announces that the “Welshmen” are dispersed, Richard, in a moment, forgets the “angels” who will guard the right. His cheek pales at the evil tidings. After a pause, and upon the exhortation of his friends, his “sluggard majesty” awakes ; the man still sleeps. How artificial and externally sustained is his confidence :—

“Arm, arm, my *name* ! a puny subject strikes
At thy great glory. Look not to the ground,
Ye favourites of a king.”

Scroop arrives ; and Richard avows that he is prepared for the worst. His fortitude is but a passing support. He dissimulates with himself ; for, in an instant, he flies off into a burst of terrific passion at the supposed treachery of his minions. Aumerle, when their unhappy end is explained, like a man of sense casts about for other resources :—

“Where is the duke my father with his power ?”

But Richard abandons himself to his despair, in that most solemn speech, which is at once so touching with reference to the speaker, and so profoundly true in its general application :—

“No matter where; of comfort no man speak.”

His grief has now evaporated in words :—

“This ague-fit of fear is over-blown;

An easy task it is to win our own.

Say, Scroop, where lies our uncle with his power?”

Scroop's reply is decisive :—

“Your uncle York hath join'd with Bolingbroke.”

Richard is positively relieved by knowing the climax of his misfortunes. The alternations of hope and fear were too much for his indecision. He is forced upon a course, and he is almost happy in his weakness :—

“Beshrew thee, cousin, which didst lead me forth

Of that *sweet* way I was in to despair!

What say you now? What comfort have we now?

By heaven, I'll hate him everlastingly

That bids me be of comfort any more.”

Shakspeare has painted indecision of character in Hamlet—but what a difference is there between the indecision of Hamlet and of Richard! The depth of Hamlet's philosophy engulfs his powers of action; the reflective strength of his intellect destroys the energy of his will:—Richard is irresolute and inert, abandoning himself to every new impression, because his faculties, though beautiful in parts, have no principle of cohesion;—judgment, the key-stone of the arch, is wanting.

Bolingbroke is arrived before Flint Castle. Mr. Courtenay says, “By placing the negotiation with Northumberland at Flint, Shakspeare loses the opportunity of describing the disappointment of the king, when he found himself, on his progress to join Henry at Flint, a prisoner to Northumberland, who had concealed the force by which he was accompanied.”* A Mr. Goodhall, of Man-

chester, in 1772, gave us a new ‘Richard II.’, “altered from Shakspeare, and the style imitated.” We are constrained to say that such criticism as we have extracted, and such imitations of style as that of Mr. Goodhall, are entirely on a par. Shakspeare wanted not the additional scene of Northumberland's treachery to eke out the story of Richard's fall. He was too sagacious to make an audience think that Richard might have surmounted his difficulties but for an accident. It was his business to show what was essentially true (though one episode of the truth might be wanting), that Bolingbroke was coming upon him with steps as certain as that of a rising tide towards the shivering tenant of a naked sea-rock. What was still more important, it was his aim to exhibit the overthrow of Richard, and the upraising of Bolingbroke, as the natural result of the collision of two such minds meeting in mortal conflict. The mighty physical force which Bolingbroke subdued to his purpose was called forth by his astute and foreseeing intellect: every movement of this wary chief—perhaps even from the hour when he resolved to appeal Norfolk—was a consequence from a calculated cause. On the other hand, Richard threw away every instrument of defence; the “one day too late,” with which Salisbury reproaches him—which delay was the fruit of his personal weakness and vacillation—shows that it was impossible to save him. Had he escaped from Conway, after being reduced to the extremities of poverty and suffering, in company with a few wretched followers, he must have rushed, from his utter want of the ability to carry through a consistent plan, into the toils of Bolingbroke. Shakspeare, as we must repeat, painted events whilst he painted characters. Look at Bolingbroke's bearing when York reproaches Northumberland for not saying “*King* Richard;”—look at his decision when he learns the king is at Flint;—look at his subtlety in the message to the king :—

“Harry Bolingbroke

On both his knees doth kiss King Richard's hand.”

Compare the affected humility of his profes-

* ‘Shakspeare's Historical Plays considered Historically.

sions with the real, though subdued, haughtiness of his threats—

“If not, I’ll use the advantage of my power.”

He marches “without the noise of threat’ning drum;” but he marches as a conqueror upon an undefended citadel. On the one hand, we have power without menaces; on the other, menaces without power. How loftily Richard asserts to Northumberland the terrors which are in store—the “armies of pestilence” which are to defend his “precious crown!” But how submissively he replies to the message of Bolingbroke!—

“Thus the king returns:—

His noble cousin is right welcome hither.—

Speak to his gentle hearing kind commends.”

Marvellously is the picture of the struggles of irresolution still coloured:—

“Shall we call back Northumberland, and send Defiance to the traitor, and so die?”

Beautiful is the transition to his habitual weakness—to his extreme sensibility to evils, and the shadows of evils—to the consolation which finds relief in the exaggeration of its own sufferings, and in the bewilderments of imagination which carry even the sense of suffering into the regions of fancy. We have already seen that this has been thought “deviating from the pathetic to the ridiculous.” Be it so. We are content to accept this and similar passages in the character of Richard as exponents of that feeling which made him lie at the feet of Bolingbroke, fascinated as the bird at the eye of the serpent:—

“For do we must what force will have us do.”

This is the destiny of tragedy;—but it is a destiny with foregoing causes—its seeds are sown in the varying constitution of the human mind: and thus it may be said, even without a contradiction, that a Bolingbroke governs destiny, a Richard yields to it.

We pass over the charming repose-scene of the garden—in which the poet, who in this drama has avoided all dialogues of manners, brings in “old Adam’s likeness,” to show us how the vicissitudes of state are felt and understood by the practical philosophy of the humblest of the people. We pass over, too,

the details of the quarrel scene in Westminster Hall, merely remarking that those who say, as Johnson has said, “This play is extracted from the ‘Chronicle’ of Holinshed, in which many passages may be found which Shakspeare has, *with very little alteration*, transplanted into his scenes,” would have done well to have printed the passages of the ‘Chronicle’ and the parallel scenes of ‘Richard II.’ This scene is one to which the remark refers. Will our readers excuse us giving them half-a-dozen lines as a specimen of this “very little alteration?”—

HOLINSHED.

“The Lord Fitzwater herewith rose up, and said to the king, that, where the Duke of Aumerle excuseth himself of the Duke of Gloucester’s death, I say (quoth he) that he was the very cause of his death; and so he appealed him of treason, offering, by throwing down his hood as a gage, to prove it with his body.”

SHAKSPEARE.

“If that thy valour stand on sympathies,
There is my gage, Aumerle, in gage to thine:
By that fair sun that shows me where thou stand’st,
I heard thee say, and vauntingly thou spak’st it,
That thou wert cause of noble Gloster’s death.
If thou deny’st it, twenty times thou liest;
And I will turn thy falsehood to thy heart,
Where it was forged, with my rapier’s point.”

We have long borne with these misrepresentations of what Shakspeare took from the ‘Chronicles,’ and what Shakspeare took from Plutarch. The sculptor who gives us the highest conception of an individual, idealized into something higher than the actual man—(Roubiliac, for example, when he figured that sublime image of Newton, in which the upward eye, and the finger upon the prism, tell us of the great discoverer of the laws of gravity and of light)—the sculptor has to collect something from authentic records of the features and of the character of the subject he has to represent. The ‘Chronicles’ might, in the same way, give Shakspeare the general idea of his historical Englishmen, as Plutarch of his Romans. But it was for

the poet to mould and fashion these outlines into the vital and imperishable shapes in which we find them. This is creation—not alteration.

Richard is again on the stage. Is there a jot in the *deposition scene* that is not perfectly true to his previous character? As to Bolingbroke's consistency, there cannot be a doubt, even with the most hasty reader. The king's dallying with the resignation of the crown—the prolonged talk, to parry, as it were, the inevitable act—the “ay, no! no, ay;”—the natural indignation at Northumberland's unnecessary harshness;—the exquisite tenderness of self-shrinking abasement, running off into poetry, “too deep for tears”—

“Oh, that I were a mockery king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
To melt myself away in water drops;”—

and, lastly, the calling for the mirror, and the real explanation of all his apparent affectation of disquietude;—

“These external manners of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortured
soul:”—

who but Shakspeare could have given us these wonderful tints of one human mind—so varying and yet so harmonious—so forcible and yet so delicate—without being betrayed into something different from his own unity of conception? In the *parting scene* with the queen we have still the same unerring consistency. We are told that “the interview of separation between her and her wretched husband is remarkable for its poverty and tameness.”* The poet who wrote the parting scene between Juliet and her Montague had, we presume, the command of his instruments; and though, taken separately from what is around them, there may be differences in the degree of beauty in these parting scenes, they are each *dramatically* beautiful, in the highest sense of the term. Shakspeare never went from his proper path to produce a beauty that was out of place. And yet who can read these

lines, and dare to talk of “poverty and tameness?”—

“In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
With good old folks, and let them tell thee
tales
Of woeful ages, long ago betid;
And, ere thou bid good night, to quit their
grief,
Tell thou the lamentable fall of me,
And send the hearers weeping to their beds.”

We are told, as we have already noticed, that this speech ends with “childish prattle.” Remember, Richard II. is speaking.—Lastly, we come to the *prison scene*. The soliloquy is Richard all over. There is not a sentence in it that does not tell of a mind deeply reflective in its misfortunes, but wanting the guide to all sound reflection—the power of going out of himself, under the conduct of a loftier reason than could endure to dwell upon the merely personal. His *self-consciousness* (to use the word in a German sense) intensifies, but lowers, every thought. And then the beautiful little episode of “Roan Barbary,” and Richard's all-absorbing application to himself of the story of the “poor groom of the stable.” Froissart tells a tale, how Richard was “forsaken by his favourite greyhound, which fawns on the earl.” The quaint historian, as well as the great dramatist who transfused the incident, knew the avenues to the human heart. Steevens thinks the story of Roan Barbary might have been of Shakspeare's own invention, but informs us that “Froissart relates a yet more silly tale!” Even to the death, Richard is historically as well as poetically true. His sudden valour is shown as the consequence of passionate excitement. A prose manuscript in the library of the King of France, exhibits a somewhat similar scene, when Lancaster, York, Aumerle, and others, went to him in the Tower, to confer upon his resignation:—“The king, in great wrath, walked about the room; and at length broke out into passionate exclamations and appeals to heaven; called them false traitors, and offered to fight any four of them.” The Chronicles which Shakspeare might consult were somewhat meagre, and might gain much by the addition of the records of this

* Skottowe's ‘Life of Shakspeare,’ vol. i. p. 441.

eventful reign which modern researches have discovered. If we compare *every* account, we must say that the Richard II. of Shakspeare is rigidly the true Richard. The poet is the truest historian in all that belongs to the higher attributes of history.

But with this surpassing dramatic truth in the 'Richard II.,' perhaps, after all, the most wonderful thing in the whole play—that which makes it so exclusively and entirely Shakspearean—is the evolvment of the truth under the poetical form. The character of Richard, especially, is entirely subordinated to the poetical conception of it—to something higher than the historical propriety, yet including all that historical propriety, and calling it forth under the most striking aspects. All the vacillations and weaknesses of the king, in the hands of an artist like Shakspeare, are reproduced with the most natural and vivid colours, so as to display their own characteristic effects, in combination with the principle of poetical beauty, which carries them into a higher region than the perfect command over the elements of strong individualization could alone produce. For example, when Richard says—

"Oh, that I were a mockery king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke!"—

we see in a moment how this speech belongs to the shrinking and overpowered mind of the timid voluptuary, who could form no notion of power apart from its external supports. But then, separated from the character, how exquisitely beautiful is it in itself! Byron, in his finest drama of 'Sardanapalus,' has given us an entirely different conception of a voluptuary overpowered by misfortune; and though he has said, speaking of his ideal of his own dramatic poem, "You will find all this very *unlike* Shakspeare, and so much the better in one sense, for I look upon him to be the worst of models, though the most extraordinary of writers"—it is to us very doubtful if 'Sardanapalus' would have been written, had not the 'Richard II.' of Shakspeare offered the temptation to pull the bow of Ulysses in the direction of another mark. The characters exhibit very remarkable contrasts. Sardana-

palus becomes a hero when the king is in danger;—Richard, when the sceptre is struck out of his hands, forgets that his ancestors won the sceptre by the sword. The one is the sensualist of misdirected native energy, who casts off his sensuality when the passion for enjoyment is swallowed up in the higher excitement of rash and sudden daring;—the other is the sensualist of artificial power, whose luxury consists in pomp without enjoyment, and who loses the sense of gratification when the factitious supports of his pride are cut away from him. Richard, who should have been a troubadour, has become a weak and irresolute voluptuary through the corruptions of a throne;—Sardanapalus, who might have been a conqueror, retains a natural heroism that a throne cannot wholly corrupt. But here we stop. 'Sardanapalus' is a beautiful poem, but the characters, and especially the chief character, come before us as something shadowy, and not of earth. 'Richard II.' possesses all the higher attributes of poetry,—but the characters, and especially the leading character, are of flesh and blood like ourselves.

And why is it, when we have looked beneath the surface at this matchless poetical delineation of Richard, and find the absolute king capricious, rapacious, cunning,—and the fallen king irresolute, effeminate, intellectually prostrate,—why is it, when we see that our Shakspeare herein never intended to present to us the image of "a good man struggling with adversity," and conceived a being the farthest removed from the ideal that another mighty poet proposed to himself as an example of heroism when he described his own fortitude—

"I argue not

Against heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer
Right onward,"—

why is it that Richard II. still commands our tears—even our sympathies? It is this:—His very infirmities make him creep into our affections; for they are so nearly allied to the beautiful parts of his character, that, if the little leaven had been absent, he might have been a ruler to kneel before, and a man

to love. We see, then, how thin is the partition between the highest and the lowliest parts of our nature—and we love Richard even for his faults, for they are those of our common humanity. Inferior poets might have given us Bolingbroke the lordly tyrant, and Richard the fallen hero. We might have had the struggle for the kingdom painted with all the glowing colours with which, according to the authorities which once governed opinion, a poet was bound to represent the crimes of an usurper and the virtues of a legitimate king; or, if the poet had despised the usual current of authority,

he might have made the usurper one who had cast aside all selfish and unpatriotic principles, and the legitimate king an unmitigated oppressor, whose fall would have been hailed as the triumph of injured humanity. Impartial Shakspeare! How many of the deepest lessons of toleration and justice have we not learned from thy wisdom, in combination with thy power! If the power of thy poetry could have been separated from the truth of thy philosophy, how much would the world have still wanted to help it forward in the course of gentleness and peace!

CHAPTER II.

KING HENRY IV.

SHAKSPERE found the stage in possession of a rude drama, 'The Famous Victories of Henry V.,' upon the foundation of which he constructed not only his two Parts of 'Henry IV.,' but his 'Henry V.*' That old play was acted prior to 1588; Tarleton, a celebrated comic actor, who played the clown in it, having died in that year. It is, in many respects, satisfactory that this very extraordinary performance has been preserved. None of the old dramas exhibit in a more striking light the marvellous reformation which Shakspeare, more than all his contemporaries, produced in the dramatic amusements of the age of Elizabeth.

It is to this rude drama (of which we have previously given a slight analysis) that the student of Shakspeare must refer, to learn what the popular notion of the conqueror of Agincourt was at the period when Shakspeare began to write, and, perhaps, indeed, up to the time when he gave us his own idea of Henry of Monmouth. When we have seen that, for some ten years at least, the Henry of the stage was an ill-bred unredeemed blackguard, without a single sparkle of a "better hope," surrounded by companions of the very lowest habits, thieves and cut-

throats,—when we see him, not seduced from the gravity of his station by an irrepressible love of fun, kept alive by the wit of his principal associate, but given up only to drinking and debauchery, to throwing of pots, and brawls in the streets,—when we see not a single gleam of that "sun,"

"Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world;"—

and when we know that nearly all the historians up to the time of Shakspeare took pretty much the same view of Henry's character,—we may, perhaps, be astonished to be told that Shakspeare's fascinating representation of Henry of Monmouth, "as an historical portrait, is not only unlike the original, but misleading and unjust in essential points of character."† Misleading and unjust! We admire, and even honour, Mr. Tyler's enthusiasm in the vindication of his favourite hero from every charge of early impurity. In the nature of things it was impossible that Henry of Monmouth,—in many particulars so far above his age, in literature, in accomplishments, in real magnanimity of character,—should have been the

* See Book I. chap. v. page 19.

† 'Henry of Monmouth,' by J. Endell Tyler, B.D., vol. i. p. 356.

low profligate which nearly all the ancient historians represent him to have been. But Mr. Tyler, instead of blaming Shakspeare for the view which he took of Henry's character—instead of calling upon us "to allow it no weight in the scale of evidence;"—instead of informing us that the poet's descriptions are "wholly untenable when tested by facts, and irreconcilable with what history places beyond doubt;"—instead of attempting to shake our belief in Shakspeare's general truth, by minute comparisons of particular passages with real dates, trying the poet by a test altogether out of the province of poetry;—instead of telling us that the great dramatist's imagination worked "only on the vague traditions of a sudden change for the better in the prince, immediately on his accession;"—instead of all this, Mr. Tyler ought to have called our attention to the fact that Shakspeare was the *only* man of his age who rejected the imperfect evidence of all the historians as to the character of Henry of Monmouth, and nobly vindicated him even from his own biographers, and, what was of more importance, from the coarser traditions embodied in a popular drama of Shakspeare's own day. It is not our business to enter into a discussion whether the early life of Henry was entirely blameless, as Mr. Tyler would prove. This is a question which, as far as an editor of Shakspeare is concerned, may be classed with a somewhat similar question of the character of Richard III., as argued in Walpole's 'Historic Doubts.' But the real question for us to consider is this,—what were the opinions of all the historians up to Shakspeare's own time? Mr. Tyler himself says, "Before Shakspeare's day, the reports adopted by our historiographers had fully justified him in his representations of Henry's early courses." But we contend that Shakspeare did *not* rest upon the historiographers;—he did *not* give credence to the vulgar traditions;—he did *not* believe in the story of Henry's sudden conversion;—he did *not* make him the low profligate of the old play, or of the older Chronicles. We are very much accustomed to say, speaking of Shakspeare's historical plays, that he follows Holinshed. He does so, indeed, when the truth of the historian

is not incompatible with the higher poetical truth of his own conceptions. Now, what says Holinshed about Henry V.?—"After that he was invested king, and had received the crown, he determined with himself to put upon him the shape of a new man, turning insolency and wildness into gravity and soberness. And whereas he had passed his youth in wanton pastime and riotous misorder, with a sort of misgoverned mates and unthrifty playfeers, he now banished them from his presence." Holinshed wrote this in 1557; but did he invent this character? Thomas Elmham, a contemporary of Henry V., who wrote his Life, distinctly tells us of his passing the bounds of modesty, and, "when not engaged in military exercises, he also indulged in other excesses which unrestrained youth is apt to fall into." Of Henry's sudden conversion this author also tells the story; and he dates it from his father's deathbed. Otterburn, another contemporary of Henry, gives us also the story of his sudden conversion:—"repentè mutatus est in virum alterum." Hardyng, another contemporary, and an adherent of the house of Lancaster, says—

"The hour he was crowned and anoint
He changed was of all his old condition;"

or, as he says in the argument to this chapter of his Chronicle, "he was changed from all vices unto virtuous life." Walsingham, a fourth contemporary, speaking of a heavy fall of snow on the 9th of April, the day of his coronation, says, "that some interpreted this unseasonable weather to be a happy omen; as if he would cause the snow and frost of vices to fall away in his reign, and the serene fruit of virtues to spring up; that it might be truly said by his subjects, 'Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.' Who, indeed, as soon as he was invested with the ensigns of royalty, was suddenly changed into a new man, behaving with propriety, modesty, and gravity, and showing a desire to practise every kind of virtue." There is a ballad of Henry IV.'s time addressed to Prince Henry and his brothers, to dissuade them from spending time in "youthed folily." Caxton,

who wrote in the time of Edward IV., says, "Here is to be noted that the King Henry V. was a noble prince after he was king and crowned; howbeit before in his youth he had been wild, reckless, and spared nothing of his lusts nor desires, but accomplished them after his liking." Fabyan is even more severe:—"This man before the death of his father applied himself to all vice and insolency." The story of Henry insulting the Lord Chief Justice, and being by him committed to prison, was first told by Sir Thomas Elyot, in 1534, in his book entitled 'The Governor:' and he sets out by saying, "The most renowned prince King Henry V., late King of England, during the life of his father was noted to be fierce and of wanton courage." His servant, according to this story, was arraigned for felony, and the prince, "incensed by light persons about him, in furious rage came hastily to the bar." According to Sir Thomas Elyot, the prince did not strike the judge; but, being "set all in a fury, all chafed, in a terrible manner came up to the place of judgment, men thinking that he would have slain the judge." Holinshed makes the blow to have been inflicted. Stow, whose Chronicle was published in 1580, gives us a much more natural version of the prince's robberies than that of the old play:—he makes them to have been wanton frolics, followed by restitution. Lastly, Hall collects and repeats all the charges against Henry of the earlier historians. In a word, there is not one solitary writer up to the time of Shakspeare that entertained any doubt that

"His addiction was to courses vain;
His companies unletter'd, rude, and shallow;
His hours fill'd up with riots, banquets,
sports."

This passage in 'Henry V.,' which is introduced by the archbishop to heighten his praises of the king by contrast with his former state, is the severest passage which Shakspeare has against the early character of the prince. It is stronger than his father's reproof, in the third act of the First Part. But where is the "insolency" of Holinshed—the "all vices" of Hardyng—the "spared nothing of his lusts and desires" of Caxton? Let it be observed, too, how careful Shakspeare

has been to make the common tradition of Henry's almost miraculous conversion rest only upon the opinion of others. The archbishop indeed says,—

"—— never Hydra-headed wilfulness
So soon did lose his seat, and all at once,
As in this king."

But the prince, in the very first scene in which he appears, thus apostrophizes his companions,—

"I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness."

Even in the 'Richard II.,' when Henry IV. speaks of his "unthrifty son," we are prepared, not for the coarse profligate of the old play, but for a high-couraged and reckless boy, offending in the very wantonness of his hot blood, which despises conventional forms and opinions:—

"As dissolute as desperate; yet, through both,
I see some sparkles of a better hope."

But it is not from the representations of others that we must form our opinion of the character of the Prince of Shakspeare. He is, indeed, the "madcap prince of Wales,"

"that daff'd the world aside,"

but he is not the "sword and buckler prince of Wales," that Hotspur would have "poisoned with a pot of ale." He is a gentleman; a companion, indeed, of loose revellers, but one who infinitely prefers the excitement of their wit to their dissipation. How graceful too, and how utterly devoid of meanness and hypocrisy, is his apology to his father for his faults! How gallantly he passes from the revels at the Boar's Head to the preparations for the battle-field! How just are his praises of Hotspur! How modest his challenge!—

"I have a truant been to chivalry."

What a key to his real kindness of heart and good nature is his apostrophe to Falstaff:—

—— "Poor Jack, farewell!
I could have better spared a better man!"

How magnanimous is his pleading for the life of the Douglas! Never throughout the two plays is there a single expression of un-

filial feeling towards his father. "My heart bleeds inwardly," says the Prince of Shakspeare, "that my father is so sick." The low profligate of the old play says, "I stand upon thorns till the crown be on my head." The king's description of his son in Shakspeare is truly in accordance with the poet's delineation of his character:—

"He hath a tear for pity, and a hand
Open as day for melting charity;
Yet notwithstanding, being incensed, he's flint;
As humorous as winter."

And yet, according to Mr. Tyler, Shakspeare has done injustice to Henry of Monmouth. When in 'Richard II.' Bolingbroke speaks of his "unthrifty son," Mr. Tyler informs us that the boy was only twelve years and a half old. "*At the very time*," says Mr. Tyler, "when, according to the poet's representation, Henry IV. uttered this lamentation (Part I., Act I. Scene 1), expressive of deep present sorrow at the reckless misdoings of his son, and of anticipations of worse, that very son was doing his duty valiantly and mercifully in Wales." Again, according to Mr. Tyler, the noble scene between Henry and his father in the third act of the First Part was not the real truth—*Henry was not then in London*;—and from a letter of Henry to his council we find that the king had received "most satisfactory accounts of his very dear and well-beloved son the prince, which gave him very great pleasure." Mr. Tyler remarks upon this letter, "It is as though history were designed on set purpose, and by especial commission, to counteract the bewitching fictions of the poet." For our own parts, we have a love of Henry as Shakspeare evidently himself had; but we have derived that love more from "the bewitching fictions" of the poet, than from what we learn from history apart from the poet. With every respect for Mr. Tyler's excellent intentions, we are inclined to think that Shakspeare has elevated the character of Henry, not only far above the calumnies of the old Chroniclers, which, we believe, were gross exaggerations, but has painted him much more amiable, and just, and merciful than we find him in the original documents which Mr. Tyler has rendered popular. Mr.

Tyler has printed a letter of Prince Henry to the council, written in 1401, and describing his proceedings in Wales against Owen Glendower. It contains the following passages:—"So we caused the whole place to be set on fire, and many other houses around it, belonging to his tenants. And then we went straight to his other place * * * * * there we burnt a fine lodge in his park, and the whole country around. * * * * * And certain of our people sallied forth, and took a gentleman of high degree * * * * * he was put to death; and several of his companions, who were taken the same day, met with the same fate. We then proceeded to the commote of Edionyon, in Merionethshire, and there laid waste a fine and populous country." Our tastes may be wrong; but we would rather hold in our affections "the madcap prince of Wales" at the Boar's Head, "of all humours, that have showed themselves humours, since the old days of goodman Adam," than adulterate the poetical idea with the documentary history of a precocious boy, burning, wasting, and slaying; or, as Mr. Tyler says, "doing his duty valiantly." There is sometimes a higher truth even than documentary truth. The burnings and slayings of Henry of Monmouth must be judged of according to the spirit of his age. Had the great dramatist represented these things, he would, indeed, have done injustice to Henry in his individual character. We believe that he most wisely vindicated his hero from the written and traditionary calumnies that had gathered round his name, not by showing him, as he did Prince John of Lancaster, a "sober-blooded boy," but by divesting his dissipation of the grossness which up to his time had surrounded it; and by exhibiting the misdirected energy of an acute and active mind, instead of the violent excesses and the fierce passions that had anciently been attributed to him. The praiseworthy attempt of Mr. Tyler to prove that there was no solid historical ground for Henry's early profligacy is founded upon a very ingenious treatise, full of antiquarian research, by Mr. Alexander Luders*. That gentleman, as it appears to

* 'An Essay on the Character of Henry V. when Prince of Wales.' 1813.

us, has left the question pretty much where he found it. He has, however, taken a right view of what our poet did for the character of Henry: "Shakspeare seemed to struggle against believing the current stories of misconduct as much as he could, that he might not let the prince down to their level."

"In the Shakspearean drama there is a vitality which grows and evolves itself from within—a key-note which guides and controls the harmonies throughout."* It is under the direction of a deep and absolute conviction of the truth of this principle—not only as applied to the masterpieces of Shakspeare, the 'Lear,' the 'Macbeth,' the 'Othello,' but to all his works without exception—that we can alone presume to understand any single drama of this poet—much less to attempt to lead the judgment of others. Until by long and patient thought we believe that we have traced the roots, and seen the branches and buddings, of that "vitality"—until by frequent listening to those "harmonies" we hear, or fancy we hear, that "key-note"—we hold ourselves to be utterly unfitted even to call attention to a solitary poetical beauty, or to develop the peculiarities of a single character. Shakspeare is not to be taken up like an ordinary writer of fiction, whose excellence may be tested by a brilliant dialogue here, or a striking situation there. The proper object of criticism upon Shakspeare is to show the dependence of the parts upon the whole; for by that principle alone can we come to a due appreciation even of the separate parts. Dull critics, and brilliant critics, equally blunder about Shakspeare, when they reject this safe guide to the comprehension of his works. We have a Frenchman before us—M. Paul Duport—who gives us an 'Analyse Raisonnée' of our poet, which is perfectly guiltless of any imaginative power to hide or adorn the dry bones of the Analysis†. Mark the confidence with which this gentleman speaks of the two plays before us! Of the first part he says, "This piece has still less of action and interest than those which preceded it—('John,

and 'Richard II.'). It is only an historical picture, the various circumstances of which have no relation amongst themselves. There is no personage who predominates over the others, so as to fix the attention of the audience. It is the anarchy of the Scene. What, however, renders it worthy an attentive examination is its division into a tragic and a comic portion. The two species are here very distinct. The tragic portion is cold, disjointed, undecided; but the comic, although absolutely foreign to the shadow of the action which makes the subject of the piece, merits sometimes to be placed by the side of the better passages of the Regnards, and even of the Molières." This is pretty decided for a blockhead; and, indeed, the decision with which he speaks could only proceed from a blockhead *par excellence*. Had this Frenchman not been supremely dull and conceited, he would have had some glimmerings of the truth, though he might not have seen the whole truth. Our own Johnson had too strong a sympathy with the marvellous talent which runs through the scenes of the 'Henry IV.' not to speak of these plays with more than common enthusiasm. The great events, he says, are interesting; the slighter occurrences diverting; the characters diversified with the profoundest skill; Falstaff is the unimitated, unimitable. But now comes the qualification—the result of Johnson looking at the parts instead of the whole:—"I fancy every reader, when he ends this play, cries out with Desdemona, 'O most lame and impotent conclusion!' As this play was not, to our knowledge, divided into acts by the author, I could be content to conclude it with the death of Henry the Fourth." Let us endeavour, in going through the scenes of these plays, with the help of the great guiding principle that Shakspeare "worked in the spirit of nature by evolving the germ from within, by the imaginative power according to an idea;"‡—let us endeavour to prove—not, indeed, that these plays do not want action and interest, and that the tragic parts are not cold, disjointed, and undecided—but that all the circumstances have relation amongst themselves, and that the comic

* Coleridge's 'Literary Remains,' vol. i. p. 104.

† 'Essais Littéraires sur Shakspeare,' 2 tom. Paris, 1828.

‡ Coleridge's 'Literary Remains,' vol. i. p. 104.

parts, so far from being absolutely foreign to the action, entirely depend upon it, and, to a certain extent, direct it. If we succeed in our attempt, we shall show that, from the preliminary and connecting lines in 'Richard II.,'—

"Can no man tell of my unthrifty son?"—

to "the most lame and impotent conclusion" which Johnson would suppress, nothing can be spared—nothing can be altered;—that Dame Quickly and Justice Silence are as essential to the progress of the action as Hotspur and the King;—that the Prince could not advance without Falstaff, nor Falstaff without the Prince;—that the poetry and the wit are co-dependent and inseparable;—and, above all, that the minute shades of character generally, and especially the extraordinary fusion of many contrary qualities in the character of Falstaff, are to be completely explained and reconciled only by reference to their connexion with the dramatic action—"the key-note which guides and controls the harmonies throughout."

Some seventy lines from the commencement of this play (we shall find it convenient to speak of the two parts as forming one drama), the "key-note" is struck. The King communicates to his friends "the smooth and welcome news" of the battle of Holmedon. His exultation is unbounded:—

"And is not this an honourable prize?

A gallant prize? ha, cousin, is it not?"

But when the King is told

"It is a conquest for a prince to boast of,"

the one circumstance—the

"One fatal remembrance, one sorrow that throws

Its deep shade alike o'er *his* joys and *his* woes,"—

the shame that extinguishes the right to boast,—comes across his mind:—

"Yea, there thou mak'st me sad, and mak'st me sin

In envy that my lord Northumberland

Should be the father of so bless'd a son:

A son, who is the theme of honour's tongue;

Amongst a grove, the very straightest plant;

Who is sweet Fortune's minion, and her pride:
Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him,
See riot and dishonour stain the brow
Of my young Harry. Oh, that it could be proved,

That some night-tripping fairy had exchanged
In cradle-clothes our children where they lay,
And call'd mine Percy, his Plantagenet!

Then would I have his Harry, and he mine.
But let him from my thoughts."

The King forces his "young Harry" from his thoughts, and talks of "young Percy's pride." But the real action of the drama has commenced, in this irrepressible disclosure of the King's habitual feelings. It is for the poet to carry on the exhibition of the "riot and dishonour,"—their course, their ebbs and flowings,—the circumstances which control, and modify, and subdue them. The events which determine the career of the Prince finally conquer the habits by which he was originally surrounded; and it is in the entire disclosure of these habits—as not incompatible with their growing modification and ultimate overthrow by those events which constitute what is called the tragic action of the drama—that every incident and every character becomes an integral part of the whole—a branch, or a leaf, or a bud, or a flower, of the one "vitality."

We have seen in what spirit the Prince of the old play which preceded Shakspeare was conceived. We have seen, also, the character of the associates by whom he was surrounded. We feel that the whole of such a representation must be untrue. The depraved and unfeeling blackguard of that play could never have become the hero of Agincourt. There was no unity of character between the Prince of the beginning and of the end of that play; and therefore there could have been no unity of action. Perhaps no mind but Shakspeare's could have reconciled the apparent contradiction which appears to lie upon the surface both of the events by which the Prince was moulded, and the characters by which he was surrounded. It was for him alone to exhibit a species of profligacy not only capable of being conquered by the higher energy which made the Prince chivalrously brave and daring, but absolutely akin

to that higher energy. This was to be effected, not only by the peculiar qualities of the Prince's own mind, but by the still more peculiar qualities of his associates. As the Prince of Shakspeare, while he

"Daff'd the world aside, and let it pass,"

never ceased to feel, in the depths of his nobler nature, "thus we play the fools with the time; and the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us,"—so he never could have been surrounded by the "Ned" and "Tom" of the old play, who must have extinguished all thoughts of "the wise," and have produced irredeemable "dishonour." Falstaff, the "unimitated, unimitable Falstaff," was the poetical creation that was absolutely necessary to the conduct of the great dramatic action,—the natural transformation of "the madcap Prince of Wales" into King Henry V. So, indeed, were all the satellites which revolve round Falstaff, sharing and reflecting his light. It is the perfect characterization of this drama which makes the incidents consistent: the characters cannot live apart from the incident; the incidents cannot move on without the characters. If we attempt to unravel the characters, and the complicated character of Falstaff especially, without reference to the incidents, we are speedily in a labyrinth. The vulgar notion of Falstaff, for example, is the stage notion. Mrs. Inchbald truly remarks, "To many spectators, all Falstaff's humour is comprised in his unwieldy person." But the same lady adopts an equally vulgar stage generalization, and calls him the "cowardly Falstaff." The "wit" of Falstaff, though slightly received into the stage conception of the character, is a very vague notion compared with the bulk and the cowardice of Falstaff. Mrs. Inchbald (we are quoting from her prefaces to the acted plays) says, "The reader who is *too refined* to laugh at the wit of Sir John must yet enjoy Hotspur's picture of a coxcomb." The refinement of the players is even more sensitive; for they altogether leave out in the representation the scene where Falstaff and the Prince alternately stand for the King and Harry—a scene to which nothing of comic

that ever was written, except, perhaps, a passage or two in Cervantes, can at all approach. The players, however, are consistent. Their intolerance of poetry and of wit are equal. Not a line do they keep of the matchless first scene of the third act, than which Shakspeare never wrote anything more spirited, more individualised, more harmonious. But we are digressing. Falstaff, then, we see, in the rude general conception of his character, is fat, cowardly, and somewhat witty. The players always double and quadruple the author's notion of his fat and his cowardice; and they kindly allow us a modicum of his wit. To be fat and to be cowardly, and even to have some wit, would go far to make an excellent *butt* for a wild young prince; but they would not make a Falstaff. These qualities would be, to such a prince as Shakspeare has conceived, little better than Bardolph's nose, or the Drawer's "Anon, anon, sir." To understand Falstaff, however, we must take him scene by scene, and incident by incident; we must study his character in its development by the incidents. "Thou art so fat-witted, with drinking of old sack, and unbuttoning thee after supper, and sleeping upon benches after noon." Here is the *sensualist* introduced to us. We have here a vista of "the halfpennyworth of bread to the intolerable deal of sack." But, if we look closely, we shall see that the Prince is exaggerating; and that Falstaff humours the exaggeration. It is Falstaff's cue to heighten all his own infirmities and frailties. "Men of all sorts," he says, "take a pride to gird at me." But he has himself a pride in the pride which they take:—"The brain of this foolish-compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that tends to laughter, more than I invent, or is invented on me: I am not only witty in myself, but the cause that wit is in other men." How immediately Falstaff turns the prince from bantering to a position in which he has to deal with an antagonist. The thrusts of wit are exchanged like the bouts of a fencing-match. The sensualist, we see, has a prodigious *activity of intellect*; and he at once passes out of the slough of vulgar sensuality. But the man of wit is also a *man of action*. He is ready for "purse-

taking;”—’t is his “vocation.” Is not this again meant to be an exaggeration? The “night’s exploit on Gadshill” was the single violence, as far as we know, of Falstaff as well as of the Prince. His “vocation” was that of a soldier. It is as a soldier that we for the most part see him throughout this drama—a soldier having charge and authority. But in the days of Henry IV., and long after, the “vocation” of a soldier was that of a plunderer, and “purse-taking” was an object not altogether unfamiliar to Falstaff’s professional vision. That Shakspeare ever meant to paint him as an habitual thief, or a companion of thieves, is, in our view, one of those absurdities which has grown up out of stage exaggeration. The Prince and Poins are equally obnoxious to the charge. And yet, although Poins, the intimate of the Prince, proposes to them, “My lads, my lads, to-morrow morning, by four o’clock early at Gadshill,” the Prince refuses to go till Poins shows him that he hath “a jest to execute.” The Prince, in the soliloquy which is intended to keep him right with those who look forward to the future king, does not talk of Falstaff and Poins as of utterly base companions:—

“I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyoked humour of *your idleness*.”

He saw, in Falstaff and Poins, the same “idleness” which was in himself—the idleness of preferring the passing pleasure, whether of sensual gratification, or of mental excitement without an adequate end—which led him to their society. His resolution to forsake the “idleness” was a very feeble one. He would for “awhile uphold” it.

The Prince is looking forward to the “virtue of the jest” that will follow the adventure on Gadshill. The once proud allies, but now haughty rivals, of his father, are, at the same time, bearding that father in his palace. Worcester is dismissed, for his “presence is too bold and peremptory.” Hotspur defends the denial of his prisoners, in that most characteristic speech which reveals his rough and passionate spirit. All the strength of his nature,—the elevation

without refinement,—the force of will rising into poetry even by its own chafings,—are fully brought out in the rapid movement of this scene. Never was the sublimity of an over-mastering passion more consummately displayed. No disjointed ravings, no callings upon the gods, no clenchings of the fist or tearings of the hair, no threats without a purpose,—none of the commonplaces which make up the staple of ordinary tragedy; but the uncontrollable rush of an energetic mind, abandoning itself from a sense of injury to impulses impossible to be guided by will or circumstance, and which finally sweeps into its own torrent all the feeble barriers of prudence which inferior natures would oppose to it. It runs its course like a mad blood horse; and every attempt to put on the bridle produces a new impatience. Exhaustion at last comes, and then how complete is the exhaustion!—“I have done in sooth;”—a word or two of question, a word or two of assent, to the calm proposals of Worcester;—and the passion of talk is ready to become the passion of action. We may now understand what Shakspeare meant by approximating the ages of Hotspur and Henry of Monmouth. Let us make Hotspur forty-five years of age, and Henry sixteen, as the literalists would have it, and the whole dramatic structure crumbles into dust. Under the poet’s hand we see that Hotspur is the good destiny of the young Henry; that his higher qualities are to fire the Prince’s ambition; that his rashness is to lead to the Prince’s triumph. Eastcheap is Hal’s holiday scene; but the field of Shrewsbury will be Harry’s working-place.

All the minor characters and situations of this drama are wonderfully wrought up. The inn-yard at Rochester is one of those little pictures which live for ever in the memory, because they are thoroughly true to nature. Who that has read this scene, and has looked out upon the darkness of a winter morning, has not thought of “Charles’ wain over the new chimney?” Who has not speculated upon the grief of the man with one idea, of Robin ostler, who “never joyed since the price of oats rose?” We see not the “franklin from the wild of Kent,

who hath brought three hundred marks with him in gold ;” but we form a notion of that sturdy and portly English yeoman. The “eggs and butter” which the travellers have at breakfast even interest us. This is the art by which a fiction becomes a reality, —the art of a Defoe, as well as of a Shakspeare. But all this is but a preparation for the exploit of Gadshill. We hardly know what limits there are to the comedy of humour, but it seems impossible to go beyond *this*. *Practical* wit is here carried as far as it can well go. There are other scenes in this play where the sense of the comic is brought from a deeper region of the heart ; —but there are none more laughter-provoking. The helplessness of Falstaff, without his horse, is in itself a humorous situation ; but how doubly rich does the humour become by the contrast of his nimbleness of mind with his heaviness of body ! His soliloquies are always rich, but they are especially so in connexion with the odd situations out of which they grow. Here his own sense of the ludicrousness of his position carries off the ill humour which he feels at those who have placed him in it. “Have you any levers to lift me up again, being down ?” And then how characteristic is his abuse of his tormentors ! —“An I have not ballads made upon you all, and sung to filthy tunes, let a cup of sack be my poison.” In the very act of the robbery, Falstaff’s habit of laughing at himself is as predominant as when he is making fun for the prince : “Hang ye, *gorbellied* knaves ; are ye undone ? No, ye *fat chuffs* ; I would your store were here ! On, *bacons*, on ! What, ye knaves, *young men* must live.” The robbery is complete. “The thieves have bound the true men.” The Prince and Poins rob the thieves :—

“Each takes his fellow for an officer.”

The question here arises whether Falstaff, thus discomfited, was meant by Shakspeare for a coward. A long essay, and a very able one, has been written to prove that Falstaff was not a coward*. This essay, which was originally published in 1777, is, considering

the time at which it appeared, a remarkable specimen of genial criticism upon Shakspeare. The author then stood almost alone in the endeavour to understand the poet in his admiration of him. It would be beside our purpose to furnish any analysis of this essay ; and indeed this one disputed point of Falstaff’s character is made to assume a disproportionate importance by being the subject of an elaborate defence. Mackenzie, in ‘The Lounger,’ appears to us to have put the point very neatly : “Though I will not go so far as a paradoxical critic has done, and ascribe valour to Falstaff ; yet, if his cowardice is fairly examined, it will be found to be not so much a weakness as a principle. In his very cowardice there is much of the sagacity I have remarked in him ; he has the sense of danger, but not the discomposure of fear.”

The interval between the double robbery and the fun which is to result from it carries us back to Hotspur. We are admitted to a glimpse of the dangers which begin to surround him ; the falling off of friends, —the confidence that rises over difficulties, even to the point of rashness. But we have a new interest in Hotspur. He has a wife, —one of those women that Shakspeare only has painted ; —timid, restless, affectionate, playful, submissive, — a lovely woodbine hanging on the mighty oak. The indifference of Hotspur to every thought but the one dominant idea is beautifully wrought out in this little scene ; and the whole carries on the action unobtrusively, but decidedly : it has the combined beauty of repose and movement. To those who cannot see the connexion of the action, in Hotspur and his wife at Warkworth, and the Prince and Falstaff at Eastcheap, we would commend M. Paul Duport.

Shakspeare has opened to us a secret, in the scene between the Prince and the Drawer. “This scene,” says Johnson, “helped by the distraction of the Drawer and the grimaces of the Prince, may entertain upon the stage, but affords not much delight to the reader. The author has judiciously made it short.” The scene, as we apprehend, was introduced by Shakspeare to show the quality of the

* ‘An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff. By Maurice Morgann, Esq.’

Prince's wit when unsustained by that of Falstaff. The Prince goes to this boy-play with the Drawer, "to drive away the time till Falstaff come." With Poins, who is a cold gentlemanly hanger-on, the Prince has no exuberance; he is playful, smart, voluble, but not witty. Falstaff is necessary to him to call out the higher qualities of his intellect. He fancies that he is laughing at Falstaff: while, in truth, the sagacity, the readiness, the presence of mind, the covert sarcasm, the unrestrained impudence, and the crowning wit of that extraordinary humorist, at once rouse the Prince's mind into a state of activity which, in itself, would be pleasurable, but is doubly fascinating in connexion with the self-complacency which tells him that the man who thus stimulates him has a thousand prominent points to be ridiculed, and that the subject of the ridicule will be the first to enjoy the jest. It would be vain for us to attempt any dissection of the great scene which follows. We would, however, observe that, to our minds, "the incomprehensible lies" which Falstaff tells,—the "two or three and fifty upon poor old Jack,"—the "two rogues in buckram suits,"—the four, the seven, the nine, the eleven,—the "three misbegotten knaves in Kendal green,"—are lies that are intended to be received as lies,—an incoherent exaggeration for the purpose of drawing out the real facts. The unconquerable good humour and elation of spirit which Falstaff displays throughout the whole scene show as if he had a glimpse or a shrewd suspicion of the truth. But, in the midst of the revelry, the "villainous news abroad" penetrates even to the Boar's Head. Yet the fun never stops; and Falstaff is desirous to "play out the play," even when the Sheriff is at the door. When the Sheriff demands the "gross fat man," whom the "hue and cry hath followed," the Prince replies,

"The man, I do assure you, is not here."

Falstaff was behind the arras. We do not go along with Steevens, who says, "Every reader must regret that Shakspeare *would not give himself the trouble* to furnish Prince Henry with some more pardonable excuse,

without obliging him to have recourse to an absolute falsehood, and that too uttered under the sanction of so strong an assurance." We do not agree with Steevens, because, in our belief, it was Shakspeare's intention to show that the Prince could not come out of these scenes without a moral contamination. The lie was an inevitable consequence of the participation in the robbery. The money might be restored, but the accomplice must be protected.

Is it by accident that we are now to pass from the region of the highest wit into the region of the highest poetry? Brilliant as the scenes at the Boar's Head are, they leave an unsatisfactory impression upon the moral sense; and they are meant to do so. The character of Falstaff is essentially anti-poetical. It may appear a truism to say this,—and yet he has fancy enough for a large component part of a poet. His wit is for the most part a succession of images; but his imagination sees only the ludicrous aspect of things, and so the images are all of the earth—they cannot go out of our finite nature. Thus it is that, when in company with Falstaff, the prince exhibits no one particle of that enthusiasm which goes to form the chivalrous portion of his after-character. Up to this point, then, his nature appears essentially less elevated than the natures of his enemies. Hotspur is a being of lofty passions—Glendower one of wild and mysterious imaginations. How singularly are their characters developed in the scene at Bangor! The solemn credulity of the reputed magician,—the sarcastic unbelief of the impatient warrior,—are equally indications of men in earnest. Harry of Monmouth up to this time has been playing a part. Excellently as he has played it, he was still only the second actor; for Falstaff beats him out and out, through the rich geniality of his temperament. Falstaff at this time approaches much nearer to the earnestness of Glendower than Harry does to the exaltation of Hotspur. When Falstaff exclaims "Banish plump Jack, and banish all the world," we feel that he is as sincere as Glendower when he says,

"I say, the earth did shake when I was born."

But the poetical elevation of the scene at Bangor is a fit introduction also to the new situation in which we shall see the Prince. It is skilfully interposed between the revels at the Boar's Head and the penitential interview of Henry with his father. The players, discarding this poetical scene, allow us no resting-place between the debauch and the repentance. In the "private conference" between Henry IV. and his son, the character of Bolingbroke is sustained with what we may truly call historical accuracy. The solemn dignity of the offended father, displaying itself in the very structure of the verse—

"I know not whether God will have it so,
For some displeasing service I have done,
That, in his secret doom, out of my blood
He'll breed revengement and a scourge for
me:"—

the calm and calculating prudence with which the king runs over the successful passages of his own history—the example that he holds up to his son's ambition, of Percy, who

"—— doth fill fields with harness in the
realm:"—

the striking picture of the dangers with which his throne is surrounded—and the final most bitter reproof—

"Why, Harry, do I tell thee of my foes,
Which art my nearest and dearest enemy?"—

all this exhibits the masterly politician, but it does not show us the deep passion of the father; nor does it hold up to the Prince the highest motives for a change of life. The answer of the Prince partakes somewhat of his father's policy. He is not moved to any deep and agonizing remorse; he extenuates the offences that are laid to his charge; his ambition, indeed, is roused, and he proposes to "salve the long grown wounds" of his "intemperance" by redeeming "all on Percy's head." The king is more than satisfied. The change of character of the Prince was in progress, but not in completion. It was for the old chroniclers to talk of his miraculous conversion; it was for Shakspeare to show the gradations of its course.

The character of Falstaff is developing; but it is not improving. His sensuality puts on a grosser aspect when he is alone with Bardolph his satellite. We see, too, that, if his vocation be not absolutely to "taking purses," his principles do not stand in the way of his success. When the Hostess asks him for money that he owes, he insults her. When the Prince tells him he is good friends with his father, "Rob me the exchequer, the first thing thou doest," is the inopportune answer. The Prince replies not. He is evidently in a more sober vein. Falstaff, however, has "a charge of foot;" and the alacrity which he shows is quite evidence enough that Shakspeare had no intention to make him a constitutional coward. The Prince and he are going to the same battlefield. They may exchange a passing jest or two, but the ties of intimate connexion between them seem somewhat loosened. The higher portions of the Prince's nature are expanding;—the grosser qualities of Falstaff are coming more and more into view. Shakspeare seldom attempts to add anything by the descriptions of others to the power which his characters have of developing themselves; but in this case it was necessary to present a distinct image to the spectator of the altered Harry of the Boar's Head, before he came himself upon another scene. The description of Vernon—

"I saw young Harry, with his beaver on,
His cuisses on his thighs, gallantly arm'd,
Rise from the ground like feather'd Mercury,
And vaulted with such ease into his seat
As if an angel dropp'd down from the clouds,
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,
And witch the world with noble horsemanship;"—

this fine description is the preparation for the gallant bearing of the prince in the fifth act.

The historical action of 'The First Part of Henry IV.' is the first insurrection of the Percies, which was put down by the battle of Shrewsbury. These events are the inevitable consequence of the circumstances which attended the deposition of Richard II. Bolingbroke mounted the throne by the

treachery of Richard's friends; his partisans were too great to remain merely partisans:—

“King Richard might create a perfect guess,
That great Northumberland, then false to him,
Would, of that seed, grow to a greater false-
ness.”

The struggles for power which followed the destruction of the legitimate power have been here painted by Shakspeare with that marvellous impartiality of which we have already spoken in the Notice upon ‘Richard II.’ Our sympathies would be almost wholly with Hotspur and his friends had not the poet raised up a new interest in the chivalrous bearing of Henry of Monmouth, to balance the noble character of the young Percy. The prudence and moderation of the King, accompanied, too, with high courage, still further divide the interest;—and the guilt of Worcester, in falsifying the issue of his mission, completes this division, and carries out the great political purpose of the poet, which was to show how, if a nation's internal peace be once broken, the prosperity and happiness of millions are put at the mercy of the weakness and the wickedness of the higher agents, who call themselves the interpreters of a nation's voice. Personal fear and personal ambition are, in all such cases, substituted for the public principles upon which the leaders on either side profess to act. Shakspeare shows us in these scenes the hollowness of all motives but those which result from high principles or impulses. Rash, proud, ambitious, prodigal of blood, as Hotspur is, we feel that there is not an atom of meanness in *his* composition,—and that his ambition is even virtue under a system of opinion that makes “the hero” out of those qualities which have inflicted most suffering upon humanity. When he exclaims—

“Let them come;

They come like sacrifices in their trim,
And to the fire-eyed maid of smoky war,
All hot, and bleeding, will we offer them:
The mailed Mars shall on his altar sit,
Up to the ears in blood!”—

our spirit is moved “as with a trumpet.” He would carry us away with him, were it

not for the milder courage of young Harry—the courage of principle and of mercy. Frank, liberal, prudent, gentle, but yet brave as Hotspur himself, the Prince shows us that, even in his wildest excesses, he has drunk deeply of the fountains of truth and wisdom. The wisdom of the King is that of a cold and subtle politician;—Hotspur seems to stand out from his followers as the haughty feudal lord, too proud to have listened to any teacher but his own will;—but the Prince, in casting away the dignity of his station to commune freely with his fellow-men, has attained that strength which is above all conventional power; his virtues as well as his frailties belong to our common humanity—the virtues capable, therefore, of the highest elevation,—the frailties not pampered into crimes by the artificial incentives of social position. His challenge to Hotspur exhibits all the attributes of the gentleman as well as the hero—mercy, sincerity, modesty, courage:—

“In both our armies there is many a soul
Shall pay full dearly for this encounter,
If once they join in trial. Tell your nephew,
The prince of Wales doth join with all the
world

In praise of Henry Percy: By my hopes,—
This present enterprise set off his head,—
I do not think a braver gentleman,
More active-valiant, or more valiant-young,
More daring, or more bold, is now alive,
To grace this latter age with noble deeds.
For my part, I may speak it to my shame,
I have a truant been to chivalry;
And so, I hear, he doth account me too:
Yet this before my father's majesty,—
I am content that he shall take the odds
Of his great name and estimation;
And will, to save the blood on either side,
Try fortune with him in a single fight.”

Could the Prince have reached this height amidst the cold formalities of his father's court? We think that Shakspeare meant distinctly to show that Henry of Monmouth, when he “sounded the very base-string of humility,” gathered out of his dangerous experience that spirit of sympathy with human actions and motives from which a sovereign is almost necessarily excluded; and

thus the Prince himself believes that "in everything the purpose must weigh with the folly." In the march from Harfleur to Agincourt, the Henry V. of Shakspeare says, "When lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner." Where did he learn this? Was it in the same school where his brother, John of Lancaster, learnt the cold treachery which the poet and the historian have both exhibited in his conduct to Scroop, and Mowbray, and Hastings? Henry of Monmouth, when he supposes Falstaff dead, drops a tear over him:—

"What! old acquaintance! could not all this
flesh

Keep in a little life? Poor Jack, farewell!

I could have better spared a better man.

Oh, I should have a heavy miss of thee,

If I were much in love with vanity."

Henry here shows the restraint which he had really put upon himself in his wildest levities:—but he feels as a man the supposed loss of his "old acquaintance:" John of Lancaster, on the other hand, has no frailties,—but he has no sympathies. Falstaff hits off his character in a word or two: "A man cannot make him laugh."

Thus far have we shown the unity of purpose with which Shakspeare, in tracing the course of the civil troubles which followed the usurpation of Henry IV., has exhibited the process by which the character of Henry V. was established. The "mad wag" of Gadshill is the hero of the field of Shrewsbury:—

"Thou hast redeem'd thy lost opinion."

The Percy lies at his feet. He looks upon his adversary dead, with the same gentle and chivalrous spirit as he manifested towards him living:—

"Fare thee well, great heart!"

It is in the same spirit that he deals with "the noble Scot:—

"Go to the Douglas, and deliver him

Up to his pleasure, ransomless, and free:

His valour, shown upon our crests to-day,

Hath taught us how to cherish such high deeds,
Even in the bosom of our adversaries."

The *Second Part* of this drama is bound up with the First, through the most skilful management of the poet. Each Part was, of course, acted as a distinct play in Shakspeare's time. In our own day the Second Part is very seldom produced; but, when it is, the players destroy the connecting link, by suppressing one of the finest scenes which Shakspeare ever wrote—the scene between Northumberland, Lord Bardolph, and Morton, at Warkworth Castle. Colley Cibber, however, wrenched the scene out of its place, and, cutting it up into a dozen bits, stuck it here and there throughout his alteration of 'Richard III.' Many false Cremonas are thus manufactured out of one real one; and the musical dupe is contented with the neck, or the sounding-board, of the true fiddle, while the knave who has broken it up has destroyed the one thing which constituted its highest value—the perfect adaptation of all its parts. Let this outrage upon Shakspeare, however, pass. We live in a time when it cannot be repeated. The connecting scene between the First and Second Parts brings us back to the Northumberland of 'Richard II.' We have scarcely seen him in 'The First Part of Henry IV.'—but here we are made to feel that the retribution which awaited his treacherous and selfish actions has arrived. He betrayed Richard to Bolingbroke—he insulted the unhappy king in his hour of misery—he incited his son and his brother to revolt from Henry, and then deserted them in their need. We feel, then, that the misery which produces his "strained passion" is a just visitation:—

"Now let not Nature's hand

Keep the wild flood confined! let order die!

And let the world no longer be a stage

To feed contention in a lingering act;

But let one spirit of the first-born Cain

Reign in all bosoms, that, each heart being set

On bloody courses, the rude scene may end,

And darkness be the burier of the dead!"

His cold and selfish policy destroyed his son at Shrewsbury, and he endures to be reproached for it by that son's widow:—

"The time was, father, that you broke your word,

When you were more endear'd to it than now;
When your own Percy, when my heart's dear Harry,

Threw many a northward look, to see his father

Bring up his powers; but he did long in vain."

He again yields to his own fears, even more than to the entreaties of his wife and daughter, and once more waits for "time and 'vantage." His eventful fall, therefore, moves no pity; and we feel that the poet properly dismisses him and his fate in three lines:—

"The earl Northumberland, and the lord Bardolph,

With a great power of English and of Scots,
Are by the sheriff of Yorkshire overthrown."

The conspirators against Henry IV., who are now upon the scene, are far less interesting than those of the former Part. We have no character that can at all compare with Hotspur, or Glendower, or Douglas. Hastings has, indeed, the rashness of Hotspur, but without his fire and brilliancy; the Archbishop is dignified and sententious; Lord Bardolph sensible and prudent. Neither the characters nor the incidents afford any scope for the highest poetry. The finest thing in the scenes where the conspirators appear is the speech of the Archbishop:—

"An habitation giddy and unsure

Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart."

To the conspirators are opposed John of Lancaster and Westmoreland. In the scene where these leaders (fitting representatives, indeed, of the cruel and treacherous times which we call the days of chivalry) tempt Hastings, and Mowbray, and the Archbishop, to disband their forces, and then arrest them for treason, Shakspeare has contrived to make us hate the act and the actors with an intensity which is the natural result of his *dramatic* power. Johnson, however, says, "It cannot but raise some indignation to find this horrid violation of faith passed over thus slightly by the poet, without any note of censure or detestation." Malone agrees in this complaint: "Shakspeare, here, as in many other places, has merely followed the

historians, who related this perfidious act without animadversion. But there is certainly no excuse; for it is the duty of a poet always to take the side of virtue." Holinshed, in a marginal note, describes this treachery as "The subtill policie of the Earle of Westmerland." Now, we quite admit that it was the duty of the historian to call this "subtill policie" by some much harder name; but we utterly deny that it was the duty of the poet to introduce a fine declamation about virtue and honour, such as Johnson himself would have introduced,

"To please the boys, and be a theme at school."

Shakspeare has made it perfectly evident that the treachery by which the Archbishop and his friends were sacrificed was deliberately arranged by Prince John and Westmoreland. When the young general is becoming violent with Hastings, Westmoreland most artfully reminds him that all this is waste of time—that they have something in store more effective than reproaches:—

"Pleaseth your grace to answer them directly,
How far-forth you do like their articles?"

The crafty prince answers to his cue without hesitation:—

"I like them all, and do allow them well;"

and he follows up the promise of redress by

"here, between the armies,

Let's drink together friendly, and embrace."

To this duplicity are opposed the frankness of Hastings and the wisdom of the Archbishop:—

"A peace is of the nature of a conquest:
For then both parties nobly are subdued,
And neither party loser."

In full contrast to the confiding honesty of these men stands out the dirty equivocation of Prince John:—

"Arch. Will you thus break your faith?

P. John.

I pawn'd thee none:

I promised you redress of these same grievances
Whereof you did complain."

Is there anything more wanting to make us detest "this horrid violation of faith?" One

thing, which the poet has given us,—the cruelty which follows the perfidy :—

“Strike up our drums, pursue the scatter’d stray.”

To our minds, after this *dramatic* picture, we can well dispense with any *didactic* explanations. The simple question of Mowbray (which is evaded)—

“Is this proceeding just and honourable?”—

is quite enough to show the dullest that the poet did “take the side of virtue.”

The scene, in the first act of the Second Part, between Falstaff and the Lord Chief Justice, takes us back to the field of Shrewsbury :—

Attendant. Falstaff, an’t please your lordship.

Ch. Justice. He that was in question for the robbery?

Attendant. He, my lord : but he hath since done good service at Shrewsbury ; and, as I hear, is now going with some charge to the lord John of Lancaster.”

We have seen Falstaff, in his progress to that battle-field, an unscrupulous extortioner, degrading his public authority by making it the instrument for his private purposes : “I have misused the king’s press damnably. I have got, in exchange of a hundred and fifty soldiers, three hundred and odd pounds.” We have seen his deportment in the battle : “I have led my ragamuffins where they are peppered ;”—this is not cowardice. We have seen him in the heat of the fight jesting and dallying with his bottle of sack :—this is not cowardice. Himself is his best expositor : “I like not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath : Give me life : which if I can save, so : if not, honour comes unlooked for, and there’s an end.” Again : “The better part of valour is discretion ; in the which better part, I have saved my life.” What is this but the absence of that higher quality of the mind, be it a principle or a feeling, which constitutes the heroic character—the poetry of action ? We find the absence of this quality in Iago, as well as in Falstaff. Look at his reply to Cassio’s lament : “I have lost the immortal part, sir, of my-

self, and what remains is bestial.—My reputation, Iago, my reputation.” “As I am an honest man, I thought you had received some bodily wound ; there is more offence in that than in reputation. Reputation is an idle and most false imposition.” This is perfectly equivalent to Falstaff’s “Can honour set to a leg ? . . . Honour is a mere scutcheon.” Falstaff’s assault, too, upon the dead Percy is exactly in the same spirit, and so are the lie and the boast which follow the exploit : “I’ll take it upon my death, I gave him this wound in the thigh : if the man were alive, and would deny it, I would make him eat a piece of my sword.” Shakspeare has drawn a liar, a braggart, and a coward in Parolles*. He has also in the play before us, and in ‘Henry V.,’ given us Pistol, a braggart and a coward. But how essentially different are both these characters from Falstaff. And yet Johnson, with a singular want of discrimination in one who relished Falstaff so highly, says, “Parolles has many of the lineaments of Falstaff.” Helena, in ‘All’s Well that Ends Well,’ thus truly describes Parolles :—

“I know him a notorious liar,

Think him a great way fool, solely a coward.”

Parolles is a braggadocio who puts himself into a difficulty by undertaking an adventure for which he has not the requisite courage, and then in his double cowardice endeavours to lie himself out of the scrape. How entirely different is this from Falstaff ! He volunteers no prodigious feat from which he shrinks. He exercises his accustomed sagacity to make the most of his situation by the side of the dead Percy : “Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me ;” and when the lie is told,—“We rose both at an instant, and fought a long hour by Shrewsbury clock,”—it is precisely of the same character as the “incomprehensible lies” about the men in buckram ;—something that the utterer and the hearers cannot exactly distinguish for jest or earnest. The Prince thus receives the story :—

“This is the strangest fellow, brother John.”

* ‘All’s Well that Ends Well.’

Again, look at Pistol swallowing the leek, in 'Henry V.,' and Pistol kicked down stairs by Falstaff, in this play,—and note the difference between "a counterfeit cowardly knave" and Falstaff. The truth is, all these generalities about Falstaff, and false comparisons arising out of the generalities, are popular mistakes too hastily received into criticism. There is infinitely more truth in Mackenzie's parallel between Falstaff and Richard III. than in Johnson's comparison of Falstaff with Parolles. "Both," says Mackenzie, "are men of the world; both possess that sagacity and understanding which is fitted for its purposes; both despise those refined feelings, those motives of delicacy, those restraints of virtue, which might obstruct the course they have marked out for themselves. . . . Both use the weaknesses of others, as skilful players at a game do the ignorance of their opponents; they enjoy the advantage, not only without self-reproach, but with the pride of superiority. . . . Indeed, so much does Richard in the higher walk of villainy resemble Falstaff in the lower region of roguery and dissipation, that it were not difficult to show, in the dialogue of the two characters, however dissimilar in situation, many passages and expressions in a style of remarkable resemblance." * Mackenzie has given us no example of the remarkable resemblance of passages and expressions; and, indeed, after a careful comparison, we doubt whether such resemblances of "expression" do exist. But what is more to the purpose, and more in confirmation of Mackenzie's theory, Falstaff and Richard, throughout their career, display the same "alacrity of spirit," the same "cheer of mind," the same readiness in meeting difficulties, the same determination to surmount them. One parallel, and that a very remarkable one, will sufficiently illustrate this. The first scene between the Lord Chief Justice and Falstaff,—that scene of matchless impudence and self-reliance,—and the scene where Richard evades Buckingham's claim to the earldom of Hereford, are as similar as the difference of circumstances will allow them to be. We give the parallel passages:—

* 'Lounger,' No. 69.

FALSTAFF.

Ch. Just. Sir John Falstaff, a word with you.

Fal. My good lord!—Give your lordship good time of day. I am glad to see your lordship abroad: I heard say your lordship was sick: I hope your lordship goes abroad by advice. Your lordship, though not clean past your youth, hath yet some smack of age in you, some relish of the saltiness of time; and I most humbly beseech your lordship to have a reverend care of your health.

Ch. Just. Sir John, I sent for you before your expedition to Shrewsbury.

Fal. If it please your lordship, I hear his majesty is returned with some discomfort from Wales.

Ch. Just. I talk not of his majesty:—You would not come when I sent for you.

Fal. And I hear, moreover, his highness is fallen into this same whoreson apoplexy.

Ch. Just. Well, heaven mend him! I pray, let me speak with you.

Fal. This apoplexy is, as I take it, a kind of lethargy; a sleeping of the blood, a whoreson tingling.

Ch. Just. What tell you me of it? be it as it is.

Fal. It hath its original from much grief; from study, and perturbation of the brain: I have read the cause of his effects in Galen; it is a kind of deafness.

Ch. Just. I think you are fallen into the disease; for you hear not what I say to you."

RICHARD III.

Buck. My lord, I claim the gift, my due by promise,

For which your honour and your faith is pawn'd;

The earldom of Hereford, and the moveables,
Which you have promised I shall possess.

K. Rich. Stanley, look to your wife; if she convey

Letters to Richmond, you shall answer it.

Buck. What says your highness to my just request?

K. Rich. I do remember me,—Henry the Sixth

Did prophesy that Richmond should be king,
When Richmond was a little peevish boy.

A king!—perhaps—

Buck. My lord—

K. Rich. How chance, the prophet could not at that time

Have told me, I being by, that I should kill him?

Buck. My lord, your promise for the earldom,—

K. Rich. Richmond!—When last I was at Exeter,
The mayor in courtesy show'd me the castle,
And called it—Rouge-mont: at which name I started;

Because a bard of Ireland told me once,
I should not live long after I saw Richmond.

Buck. My lord,—

K. Rich. Ay, what's o'clock?

Buck. I am thus bold to put your grace in mind

Of what you promised me.

K. Rich. Well, but what's o'clock?

Buck. Upon the stroke of ten.

K. Rich. Well, let it strike."

Falstaff again not unfrequently reminds us of Iago. We have already noticed this resemblance in one particular. The humorous rogue and the sarcastic villain are equally unscrupulous in their attacks upon the property of others. Falstaff making the Hostess withdraw the action and lend him more money, and Iago's advice to Roderigo, "Put money in thy purse," supply an obvious example. Falstaff, in his schemes upon Justice Shallow, hugs himself in the very philosophy of roguery; "If the young dace be a bait for the old pike, I see no reason, in the law of nature, but I may snap at him." Iago thinks it would be a disgrace to his own intellectual superiority if he did not plunder his dupe:—

"Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:

For I mine own gain'd knowledge should profane,

If I would time expend with such a snipe,

But for my sport and profit."

Falstaff, however, is not all knave, as Richard and Iago are each all villain. Richard and Iago are creatures of antipathies; Falstaff is a creature of sympathies. There is something genial even in his knavery. With Dame Quickly and Doll, with Bardolph and the Page, his good humour is irresistible: his followers evidently love him. The Hostess speaks their thoughts:—"Well, fare thee well: I have known thee these twenty-nine years come peascod-time; but an honestest and truer-hearted man—Well, fare thee well." He extracts Shallow's money from his purse as much by his sociality as his cunning. Even the grave Lord Chief

Justice is half moved to laugh at him and with him. We have already spoken of the fascination which he exercised over the mind of the prince; and even when Harry is in many respects a changed man—when he has shown us the heroical side of his character—we still learn that he has been "so much engrafted to Falstaff." The dominion which he exercised over all his associates he exercises over every reader of Shakspeare. We are never weary of him; we can never hate him; we doubt if we can despise him; we are half angry with the prince for casting him off; we are quite sure that there was no occasion to send him to the Fleet; when we hear in 'Henry V,' that the "king has killed his heart," we are certain that, with all his selfishness, there were many kind and loving feelings about that heart, which neglect and desertion would deeply touch; and when at last we see him, in poor Dame Quickly's description of his deathbed, "fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends," we involuntarily exclaim, "Poor Jack, farewell."

We must now recall the attention of our readers to the principle with which we set out,—that the great dramatic action of these plays is the change of character in the Prince of Wales. In the first part we have seen his levities cast away, when his ambition called upon him to answer the reproofs of his father by heroic actions:—

"And, in the closing of some glorious day,

Be bold to tell you that I am your son."

Years pass on after the battle of Shrewsbury; and the Prince has not entirely cast aside his habits. The duty of meeting the insurrection under Scroop is not committed to him. We find him in London, playing the fool with the time, but yet "sad," looking forward to higher things; "let the end try the man." His sense of duty is, however, roused into instant action at the news from the north:—

"By Heaven, Poins, I feel me much to blame,
So idly to profane the precious time;

When tempest of commotion, like the south,
Borne with black vapour, doth begin to melt,
And drop upon our bare unarmed heads.

Give me my sword and cloak:—Falstaff, good night."

The Prince and Falstaff never again meet in fellowship. Falstaff goes to the wars ; and he throws a spirit into those scenes of treachery and bloodshed which we look for in vain amidst the policy of Westmoreland and the solemnity of John of Lancaster. In Falstaff and his recruits we see the undercurrent of all warfare—the things of common life that are mixed up with great and fearful events—the ludicrous by the side of the tragic. The scene of Falstaff choosing his recruits—the corruption of Bardolph—the defence of that corruption by his most impudent captain—the amazement of the justices—the different tempers with which the recruits meet their lot—furnish altogether one of the richest realities of this unequalled drama. We here see how war, and especially civil war, presses upon the comforts even of the lowliest : “ My old dame will be undone now for one to do her husbandry.” Is he who won the crown by civil tumult, and who wears it uneasily as the consequence of his usurpation—is he happier than the peasant who is dragged from his hut to fight in a cause which he neither cares for nor understands ? Beautifully has Shakspeare shown us what happiness Bolingbroke gained by the deposition of Richard :—

“ How many thousand of my poorest subjects
Are at this hour asleep ! O sleep, O gentle
sleep,
Nature’s soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids
down,
And steep my senses in forgetfulness ? ”

Henry is a politic and wise king ; but he is a melancholy man. The conduct of the Prince still lies heavy at his heart, and his grief

“ Stretches itself beyond the hour of death,”
in dread of the “ rotten times ” that would ensue when the Prince’s riot hath no curb. The King too is “ much ill ; ”

“ The incessant care and labour of his mind
Hath wrought the mure, that should confine
it in,
So thin, that life looks through, and will
break out.”

We are approaching that final scene when the reformation of the Prince is to be fully accomplished in the spectacle of his father’s deathbed. The King has swooned. The prince enters gaily :—

“ How now ! rain within doors, and none abroad !
How doth the king ? ”

But his gaiety is presently subdued :—

“ I will sit and watch here by the king.”

The French critic (a very unfit representative of the present state of opinion in France as to the merits of Shakspeare) gives us the following most egregious description of the scene which follows :—“ The King wakes. He calls out—misses his crown—commands the Prince to come to him—and overwhelms him with reproaches for that impatience to seize upon his inheritance which will not wait even till his father’s body is cold. Henry, *with an hypocrisy worse than the action which he would defend*, pretends only to have taken away the crown through indignation that it had shortened the days of his father ! ” This is to read poetry in a literal spirit. We commend the fourth scene of the fourth act (Part II.) to our readers, without another remark that may weaken the force of M. Paul Duport’s objections.

Through that great trial which has for awhile softened and purified the hearts of most men—the death of a father—has Henry passed. But he has also put on the state of a king. He has done so amidst the remembrances and fears of his brothers and advisers :—

“ You all look strangely on me.”

The scene with the Lord Chief Justice ensues,—written with all Shakspeare’s rhetorical power. Henry has solemnly taken up his position :—

“ The tide of blood in me
Hath proudly flow’d in vanity, till now :
Now doth it turn, and ebb back to the sea.”

It is in this solemn assurance, publicly made upon the first occasion of meeting his subjects, that we must rest the absolute and inevitable necessity of Henry’s harshness to Falstaff. The poet has most skilfully contrived to bring out the worst parts of Fal-

staff's character when he learns the death of Henry IV.—his presumption—his rapacity—his evil determinations: "Let us take any man's horses;—the laws of England are at my commandment. Happy are they which have been my friends; and woe to my lord chief justice." When he plants himself in the way of the coronation procession to "leer" upon the King—when he exclaims "God save thy grace, king Hal,"—Henry was compelled to assert his consistency by his severity. Warburton has truly observed that, in his homily to Falstaff, Henry makes a trip, and is sliding into his old habit of laughing at Falstaff's bulk:—

"know, the grave doth gape
For thee thrice wider than for other men."

He saw the rising smile, and the smothered retort, upon Falstaff's lip,—and he checks him with

"Reply not to me with a fool-born jest;
Presume not that I am the thing I was."

The very struggle, in this moment of trial, which the king had between his old habits and affections and his new duties, demands this harshness. We understand from Prince John that, though Falstaff is taken to the Fleet, he is not to be utterly deserted:—

"He hath intent, his wonted followers
Shall all be very well provided for;
But all are banish'd, till their conversations
Appear more wise and modest to the world."

The dramatic action is complete. Henry of Monmouth has passed through the dangerous trial of learning the great lessons of humanity amidst men with whom his follies made him an equal. The stains of this contact were on the surface. His heart was first elevated by ambition—then purified by sorrow—and so

"Consideration like an angel came,
And whipp'd th' offending Adam out of him."

CHAPTER III.

KING HENRY V.

'HENRY V.' was first printed in 1600, under the following title:—'The Chronicle History of Henry the Fift, with his battell fought at Agin Court in France. Together with auntient Pistoll.' This copy, which differs most materially from the text of the folio, was reprinted in 1602, and again in 1608. The quarto of 1600 runs only to 1800 lines; whilst the lines in the folio edition amount to 3500. Not only is the play thus augmented by the additions of the choruses and new scenes, but there is scarcely a speech, from the first scene to the last, which is not elaborated. In this elaboration the old materials are very carefully used up; but they are so thoroughly refitted and dovetailed with what is new, that the operation can only be compared to the work of a skilful architect, who, having an ancient mansion to enlarge and beautify, with a strict regard to its original character, preserves every

feature of the structure, under other combinations, with such marvellous skill, that no unity of principle is violated, and the whole has the effect of a restoration in which the new and the old are undistinguishable. The alterations are so manifestly those of the author working upon his first sketch, that we are utterly at a loss to conceive upon what principle some of our editorial predecessors have reconciled the differences upon the easy theory of a surreptitious copy.

A passage in the chorus to the fifth act proves, beyond doubt, that the choruses formed a part of the performance in 1599; but this does not prove that there was not an earlier performance without the choruses. The first quarto was printed in 1600, after the choruses were brought upon the stage; but, because they are not found in that first quarto, it is asserted that the copy from which that edition was printed was "not a

first draught or hasty sketch." Malone and Steevens appear to us to have fallen into the mistake that a copy could not, at one and the same time, be a piracy and a sketch. According to their theory, if it is procured by fraud, it must be an "imperfect transcript." Is it not much more easy to believe that, after a play had been thoroughly remodelled, the original sketch which existed in some playhouse copy might be printed without authority, and continue so to be printed, rather than that an imperfect transcript should be printed, and continue to be printed, in which the most striking and characteristic passages of the play were omitted? But the question of "imperfect transcript" or "hasty sketch" may, to our minds, be at once disposed of by internal evidence. We will take a passage from the very first scene of the quarto of 1608, and print with it the text of the folio. Open the book where we may, similar examples will present themselves:—

QUARTO OF 1608.

Bishop. God and his angels guard your sacred throne,

And make you long become it!

King. Sure, we thank you: and, good my lord, proceed

Why the law Salique which they have in France,

Or should or should not stop in us our claim:
And God forbid, my wise and learned lord,
That you should fashion, frame, or wrest the same.

For God doth know how many now in health
Shall drop their blood, in approbation

Of what your reverence shall incite us to.

Therefore take heed how you impawn our person,

How you awake the sleeping sword of war:

We charge you, in the name of God, take heed.

After this conjuration, speak, my lord:

And we will judge, note, and believe in heart,

That what you speak is wash'd as pure

As sin in baptism."

FOLIO OF 1623.

Canterbury. God and his angels guard your sacred throne,

And make you long become it!

K. Hen.

Sure, we thank you.

My learned lord, we pray you to proceed:

And justly and religiously unfold,

Why the law Salique, that they have in France,

Or should, or should not, bar us in our claim.

And God forbid, my dear and faithful lord,

That you should fashion, wrest, or bow your reading,

Or nicely charge your understanding soul

With opening titles miscreate, whose right

Suits not in native colours with the truth;

For God doth know, how many, now in health,

Shall drop their blood in approbation

Of what your reverence shall incite us to:

Therefore take heed how you impawn our person,

How you awake the sleeping sword of war:

We charge you, in the name of God, take heed:

For never two such kingdoms did contend

Without much fall of blood; whose guiltless drops

Are every one a woe, a sore complaint,

'Gainst him whose wrongs give edge unto the swords

That make such waste in brief mortality.

Under this conjuration, speak, my lord:

For we will hear, note, and believe in heart,

That what you speak is in your conscience wash'd

As pure as sin with baptism."

Can any one doubt that this careful elaboration, involving nice changes of epithets, was the work of the author himself? Would the amanuensis or the reciter have given us some passages so correctly, and altogether omitted others, making substitutions which required him to reconstruct particular lines, so that the rhythm might be preserved? In the prose passages the same process of change and elaboration may be as clearly traced.

Our belief, then, is, that the original quarto of 1600 was printed after the play had appeared in its amended and corrected form, such as we have received it from the folio of 1623; but that this quarto, and the subsequent quartos, were copies of a much shorter play, which had been previously produced, and, perhaps, hastily written for some temporary occasion. We further believe

that the text of these quartos was surreptitiously obtained from the early playhouse copy, and continued through three editions to be palmed upon the public,—the author and his co-proprietors in the Globe Theatre not choosing that the amended copy should be published.

The single passage in the play which furnishes any evidence as to its date is found in the chorus to the fifth act:—

“Were now the general of our gracious empress
(As, in good time, he may) from Ireland
coming,
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword,
How many would the peaceful city quit,
To welcome him!”

The allusion cannot be mistaken. “About the end of March” (1599), says Camden, “the Earl of Essex set forward for Ireland, and was accompanied out of London with a fine appearance of nobility and gentry, and the most cheerful huzzas of the common people.” Essex returned to London on the 28th of September of the same year. This play, then, *with the choruses*, must have been performed in the summer of 1599. Without the choruses there is nothing to show that it might not have been performed earlier.

“Shakspeare,” says Frederick Schlegel, “regarded the drama as entirely a thing for the people, and, at first, treated it throughout as such. He took the popular comedy as he found it, and whatever enlargements and improvements he introduced into the stage were all calculated and conceived according to the peculiar spirit of his predecessors, and of the audience in London.”* This is especially true with regard to Shakspeare’s Histories. In the case of the ‘Henry V.’ it appears to us that our great dramatic poet would never have touched the subject, had not the stage previously possessed it in the old play of ‘The Famous Victories.’ ‘Henry IV.’ would have been perfect as a dramatic whole, without the addition of ‘Henry V.’ The somewhat doubtful mode in which he speaks of continuing the story appears to us a pretty certain indication that he rather

* ‘Lectures on the History of Literature,’ vol. ii.

shrunk from a subject which appeared to him essentially undramatic. It is, however, highly probable that, having brought the history of Henry of Monmouth up to the period of his father’s death, the demands of an audience, who had been accustomed to hail “the madcap Prince of Wales” as the conqueror of Agincourt, compelled him to “continue the story.” That he originally contemplated lending to it the interest of his creation of Falstaff is also sufficiently clear. It would be vain to speculate why he abandoned this intention; but it is evident that, without the interest which Falstaff would have imparted to the story, the dramatic materials presented by the old play, or by the circumstances that the poet could discover in the real course of events, were extremely meagre and unsatisfying. It is our belief, therefore, that, having hastily met the demands of his audience by the first sketch of ‘Henry V.’ as it appears in the quarto editions, he subsequently saw the capacity which the subject presented for being treated in a grand lyrical spirit. Instead of interpolating an under-plot of petty passions and intrigues,—such, for the most part, as we find in the dramatic treatment of an heroic subject by the French poets,—he preserved the great object of his drama entire by the intervention of the chorus. Skilfully as he has managed this, and magnificent as the whole drama is as a great national song of triumph, there can be no doubt that Shakspeare felt that in this play he was dealing with a theme too narrow for his peculiar powers. His drama, generally, was cast in an entirely different mould from that of the Greek tragedy. The Greek stage was, in reality, more lyrical than dramatic:—

“Thence what the lofty grave tragedians taught
In Chorus or Iambic, teachers best
Of moral prudence, with delight received
In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
Of fate, and chance, and change in human
life;
High actions and high passions best describing.”

The didactic lessons of moral prudence,—the

brief sententious precepts,—the *descriptions* of high actions and high passions,—are alien from the whole spirit of Shakspeare's drama. The 'Henry V.' constitutes an exception to the general rules upon which he worked. "High actions" are here described as well as exhibited; and "high passions," in the Shakspearean sense of the term, scarcely make their appearance upon the scene. Here are no struggles between will and fate; no frailties of humanity dragging down its virtues into an abyss of guilt and sorrow,—no crimes,—no obduracy,—no penitence. We have the lofty and unconquerable spirit of national and individual heroism riding triumphantly over every danger; but the spirit is so lofty that we feel no uncertainty for the issue. We should know, even if we had no foreknowledge of the event, that it must conquer. We can scarcely weep over those who fall in that "glorious and well-foughten field," for "they kept together in their chivalry," and their last words sound as a glorious hymn of exultation. The subject is altogether one of lyric grandeur; but it is not one, we think, which Shakspeare would have chosen for a drama.

And yet how exquisitely has Shakspeare thrown his dramatic power into this undramatic subject! The character of the King is altogether one of the most finished portraits that has proceeded from this master-hand. It could, perhaps, only have been thoroughly conceived by the poet who had delineated the Henry of the Boar's Head, and of the Field of Shrewsbury. The surpassing union, in this character, of spirit and calmness, of dignity and playfulness, of an ever-present energy, and an almost melancholy abstraction,—the conventional authority of the king, and the deep sympathy, with the meanest about him, of the man,—was the result of the most philosophical and consistent appreciation by the poet of the moral and intellectual progress of his own Prince of Wales. And let it not be said that the picture which he has painted of his favourite hero is an exaggerated and flattering representation. The extraordinary merits of Henry V. were those of the individual; his demerits were those of his times. Stand-

ing now upon the vantage-ground of four centuries of experience, in which civilization has marched onwards at a pace which could only be the result of great intellectual impulses, we may, indeed, say that, if Henry V. was justly fitted to be a leader of chivalry,—fearless, enterprising, persevering, generous, pious,—he was, at the same time, rash, obstinate, proud, superstitious, seeking after vain renown and empty conquests, instead of making his people happy by wise laws and the cultivation of sound knowledge. But Henry's character, like that of all other men, must be estimated by the circumstances amidst which he moved. After four centuries of illumination, if we find the world still suffering under the dominion of unjust governors and ambitious conquerors, we may pardon one who acted according to his lights, believing that his cause justified his attempt to seize upon another crown, instead of wearing his own wisely and peacefully. At any rate, it was not for the poet to regard the most popular king of the feudal times with the cold and severe scrutiny of the philosophical historian. It was for him to embody in the person of Henry V. the principle of national heroism; it was for him to call forth "the spirit of patriotic reminiscence." There are periods in the history of every people when their nationality, lifting them up almost into a frenzy of enthusiasm, is one of the sublimest exhibitions of the practical poetry of social life. In the times of Shakspeare such an aspect of the English mind was not unfrequently presented. Neither in our own times have such manifestations of the mighty heart been wanting. But there have been, and there may again be, periods of real danger when the national spirit shows itself drooping and languishing. It is under such circumstances that the heart-stirring power of such a play as 'Henry V.' is to be tested. Frederick Schlegel says, "The feeling by which Shakspeare seems to have been most connected with ordinary men is that of nationality." But how different is his nationality from that of ordinary men. It is reflective, tolerant, generous. It lives not in an atmosphere of falsehood and prejudice. Its theatre is war and con-

quest ; but it does not hold up war and conquest as fitting objects for nationality to dedicate itself to, except under the pressure of the most urgent necessity. Neither does it attempt to conceal the fearful responsibilities of those who carry the principle of nationality to the last arbitrement of arms, nor the enormous amount of evil which always attends the rupture of that peace, in the cultivation of which nationality is best displayed. Shakspeare, indeed, speaks proudly as a member of that English family

“ Whose blood is fet from fathers of war-proof;”

but he never forgets that he belongs to the larger family of the human race. When Henry tells the people of Harfleur,

“ The gates of mercy shall be all shut up,”

and draws that most fearful picture of the horrors of a sacked city, the poet tells us, though not in sententious precepts, that nationality, when it takes the road of violence, may be driven to put off all the gentle attributes of social life, and, assuming the “ action of the tiger,” have the tiger’s undiscriminating bloodthirstiness. When Henry, on the eve of the battle, walks secretly amidst his soldiers, the poet makes him hear that truth which kings seldom hear, and which, however the hero, in this instance, may contend with it, cannot be disguised or controverted:—“ If the cause be not good, the king himself hath a heavy reckoning to make ; when all those legs, and arms, and heads, chopped off in a battle, shall join together at the latter day, and cry all—we died at such a place ; some, swearing ; some, crying for a surgeon ; some, upon their wives left poor behind them ; some, upon the debts they owe ; some, upon their children rawly left. I am afraid there are few die well that die in battle ; for how can they charitably dispose of anything when blood is their argument ?” Again, when Henry has won France, what a France does the poet present to the winner !—

“ All her husbandry doth lie on heaps,
Corrupting in its own fertility.

Her vine, the merry cheerer of the heart,
Unpruned dies : her hedges even-pleach’d,

Like prisoners wildly overgrown with hair
Put forth disorder’d twigs : her fallow leas
The darnel, hemlock, and rank fumitory,
Doth root upon ; while that the coulter rusts,
That should deracinate such savagery :

The even mead, that erst brought sweetly
forth

The freckled cowslip, burnet, and green clover,
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,
Conceives by idleness ; and nothing teems
But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies,
burs,

Losing both beauty and utility :

And as our vineyards, fallows, meads, and
hedges,

Defective in their natures, grow to wildness ;
Even so our houses, and ourselves, and chil-
dren,

Have lost, or do not learn, for want of time,
The sciences that should become our country ;
But grow, like savages,—as soldiers will,
That nothing do but meditate on blood,—
To swearing, and stern looks, diffused attire,
And everything that seems unnatural.”

Thoughts such as these, coming from the great poet of humanity and wisdom, are the correctives of a *false* nationality.

It is scarcely necessary for us to trace the conduct of the dramatic action of ‘ Henry V.’ in connexion with its characters. In the inferior persons of the play—the comic characters—the poet has displayed that power which he, above all men, possesses, of combining the highest poetical conceptions with the most truthful delineations of real life. In the amusing pedantry of Fluellen, and the vapourings of Pistol, there is nothing in the slightest degree incongruous with the main action of the scene. The homely bluntness of the common soldiers of the army brings us still closer to a knowledge of the great mass of which a camp is composed. Perhaps one of the most delicate but yet most appreciable instances of Shakspeare’s nationality, in all its power and justice, is the mode in which he has exhibited the characters of these common soldiers. They are rough, somewhat quarrelsome, brave as lions, but without the slightest particle of anything low or grovelling in their composition. They are fit representatives of the “ good yeomen, whose limbs were made in England.” We

almost as anxiously desire that these men should triumphantly show the "mettle of their pastures," as that the heroic Harry and his "band of brothers" should

"Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
And teach them how to war."

On the other hand, the discriminating truth of the poet is equally shown in exhibiting to us three arrant cowards in Pistol, Nym, and Bardolph. His impartiality could afford to paint the bullies and blackguards that even our nationality must be content to reckon as component parts of every army.

This drama is full of singularly beautiful

detached passages: for example, the reflections of the King upon ceremony,—the description of the deaths of York and Suffolk,—the glorious speech of the King before the battle,—the chorus of the fourth act,—are remarkable illustrations of Shakspeare's power as a descriptive poet. Nothing can be finer, also, than the commonwealth of bees in the first act. It is full of the most exquisite imagery and music. The art employed in transforming the whole scene of the hive into a resemblance of humanity is a perfect study—every successive object, as it is brought forward, being invested with its characteristic attribute.

CHAPTER IV.

KING HENRY VI. AND KING RICHARD III.

WITH the local and family associations that must have belonged to his early years*, the subject of these four dramas of Henry VI. and Richard III., or rather the subject of this one great drama in four parts, must have irresistibly presented itself to the mind of Shakspeare, as one which he was especially qualified to throw into the form of a chronicle history. It was a task peculiarly fitted for the young poet during the first five years of his connexion with the theatre. Historical dramas, in the rudest form, presented unequalled attractions to the audiences who flocked to the rising stage. Without any undue reliance on his own powers, he might believe that he could produce something more worthily attractive than the rude dialogue which ushered in the "four swords and a buckler" of the old stage. He had not here to invent a plot, or to aim at the unity of action, of time, and of place, which the more refined critics of his day held to be essential to tragedy. The form of a chronicle history might appear to require little beyond a poetical exposition of the most attractive facts of the real Chronicles. It is in this

spirit, we think, that Shakspeare approached the execution of 'The First Part of Henry VI.' It appears to us, also, that in that very early performance he in some degree held his genius in subordination to the necessity of executing his task, rather with reference to the character of his audience and the general nature of his subject than for the fulfilment of his own aspirations as a poet. There was before him one of two courses. He might have chosen, as the greater number of his contemporaries chose, to consider the dominions of poetry and of common sense to be far sundered; and, unconscious or doubtful of the force of simplicity, he might have resolved, with them, to substitute what would more unquestionably gratify a rude popular taste—the force of extravagance. On the other hand, it was open to him to transfer to the dramatic shape the spirit-stirring recitals of the old chronicle-writers, in whose narratives, and especially in that portion of them in which they make their characters speak, there is a manly and straightforward earnestness which in itself not seldom becomes poetical. Shakspeare chose this latter course. When we begin to

* See page 148.

study the 'Henry VI.,' we find in the First Part that the action does not appear to progress to a catastrophe; that the author lingers about the details, as one who was called upon to exhibit an entire series of events rather than the most dramatic portions of them;—there are the alternations of success and loss, and loss and success, till we somewhat doubt to which side to assign the victory. The characters are firmly drawn, but without any very subtle distinctions,—and their sentiments and actions appear occasionally inconsistent, or at any rate not guided by a determined purpose in the writer. It is easy to perceive that this mode of dealing with a complicated subject was the most natural and obvious to be adopted by an unpractised poet, who was working without models. But, although the effect may be, to a certain extent, undramatic, there is impressed upon the whole performance a wonderful air of truth. Much of this must have resulted from the extraordinary quality of the poet's mind, which could tear off all the flimsy conventional disguises of individual character, and penetrate the real moving principle of events with a rare acuteness, and a rarer impartiality. In our view, that whole portion of 'The First Part of Henry VI.' which deals with the character and actions of Joan of Arc is a remarkable example of this power in Shakspeare. We find her described in the Chronicles under every form of vituperation,—a monstrous woman, a monster, a ramp, a devilish witch and satanical enchantress, an organ of the devil. She was the main instrument through which England had lost France; and thus the people still hated her memory. She claimed to be invested with supernatural powers; and thus her name was not only execrated, but feared. Neither the patriotism nor the superstition of Shakspeare's age would have endured that the Pucelle should have been dismissed from the scene without vengeance taken upon her imagined crimes; or that confession should not be made by her which would exculpate the authors of her death. Shakspeare has conducted her history up to the point when she is handed over to the stake. Other writers would have burnt her

upon the scene, and the audience would have shouted with the same delight that they felt when the Barabas of Marlowe was thrown into the caldron. Shakspeare, following the historian, has made her utter a contradictory confession of one of the charges against her honour; but he has taken care to show that the brutality of her English persecutors forced from her an inconsistent avowal, if it did not suggest a false one, for the purpose of averting a cruel and instant death. In the treatment which she receives from York and Warwick, the poet has not exhibited one single circumstance that might excite sympathy for *them*. They are cold, and cruel, and insolent, because a defenceless creature whom they had dreaded is in their power. Her parting malediction has, as it appears to us, especial reference to the calamities which await the authors of her death:—

"May never glorious sun reflex his beams
Upon the country where you make abode!
But darkness and the gloomy shade of death
Environ you."

But in all the previous scenes Shakspeare has drawn the character of the Maid with an undisguised sympathy for her courage, her patriotism, her high intellect, and her enthusiasm. If she had been the defender of England, and not of France, the poet could not have invested her with higher attributes. It is in her mouth that he puts his choicest thoughts and his most musical verse. It is she who says,

"Glory is like a circle in the water,
Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself,
Till, by broad spreading, it disperse to nought."

It is she who solicits the alliance of Burgundy in a strain of impassioned eloquence which belongs to one fighting in a high cause with unconquerable trust, and winning over enemies by the firm resolves of a vigorous understanding and an unshaken will. The lines beginning

"Look on thy country, look on fertile France,"

might have given the tone to everything that has been subsequently written in honour of the Maid. It was his accurate knowledge of

the springs of character, which in so young a man appears almost intuitive, that made Shakspeare adopt this delineation of Joan of Arc. He knew that, with all the influence of her supernatural pretension, this extraordinary woman could not have swayed the destinies of kingdoms, and moulded princes and warriors to her will, unless she had been a person of very rare natural endowments. She was represented by the Chroniclers as a mere virago, a bold and shameless trull, a monster, a witch;—because they adopted the vulgar view of her character,—the view, in truth, of those to whom she was opposed. *They* were rough soldiers, with all the virtues and all the vices of their age; the creatures of brute force; the champions, indeed, of chivalry, but with the brand upon them of all the selfish passions with which the highest deeds of chivalry were too invariably associated. The wonderful thing about 'The First Part of Henry VI.' is, that these men, who stood in the same relation of time to Shakspeare's age as the men of Anne do to ours, should have been painted with a pencil at once so vigorous and so true. The English Chroniclers, in all that regards the delineation of characters and manners, give us abundant *materials* upon which we may form an estimate of actions, and motives, and instruments; but they do not show us the instruments moving in their own forms of vitality; they do not lay bare their motives; and hence we have no real key to their actions. Froissart is, perhaps, the only contemporary writer who gives us real portraits of the men of mail. But Shakspeare marshalled them upon his stage, in all their rude might, their coarse ambition, their low jealousies, their factious hatreds—mixed up with their thirst for glory, their indomitable courage, their warm friendships, their tender natural affections, their love of country. They move over his scene, displaying alike their grandeur and their littleness. He arrays them, equally indifferent whether their faults or their excellences be most prominent. The "terrible Talbot" denounces his rival Fastolfe with a bitterness unworthy a companion in arms, enters into a fierce war of words with the Pucelle, in which her power of understanding leaves

him almost contemptible, and fights onward from scene to scene as if there were nothing high in man except the power of warring against his fellows: but he weeps like a lover over the fruitless gallantry of his devoted son; and he folds his dead boy in his rough arms, even as the mother, perishing with her child, takes the cold clay of the dear one to her bosom. This is the *truth* which Shakspeare substituted for the vague delineations of the old stage. These are the pictures of manners which he gave to the people, when other poets adopted the easier expedient of separating the imaginative from the vulgar view of human actions and passions, only by rejecting whatever was real. He gave to his audiences new characters and new manners, simply because he presented to them the characters and manners of the ages which he undertook to delineate. Other men were satisfied to find the new in what never had an existence.

But, with all this truth of characterization and of costume, the scattered events, the multifarious details, the alternations from factions at home to wars abroad, would have never hung together as a dramatic whole, had the poet not supplied a principle of cohesion, by which what is distant either in time or space, or separated in the natural progression of events, is bound together. We feel in the First Part of the 'Henry VI.' that some unseen principle is in operation by which the action still moves onward to a fixed point. One by one the great soldiers of Henry V. fade from the scene—the Salisburys, and Bedfords, and Talbots, who held France as their hunting-ground. Other actors come upon the busy stage, more distinctly associated with the scenes of factious strife which are to follow. The beginnings of those strifes are heard even amidst the din of the battle-fields of France; and, surrounded by terrible slaughter and fruitless victories, we have an unstable peace and a marriage without hope—an imbecile king and a discontented nobility. Amidst all this involvement the poet disdains, as it were, to illuminate the thick darkness beyond with a single ray. We see only the progression of events without their consequences; and the belief produced upon the mind is, that a fate presides over their direc-

tion. The effect is achieved by the masterly skill with which the future is linked to the present—felt, but not seen.

It appears to us that one of the most decisive proofs that Shakspeare was the original author of the three Parts of 'Henry VI.' is to be derived from the evidence which these plays present of the gradual increase of power in the writer. We say this without reference to the passages which have been added to 'The Contention;'* for all the real dramatic power is most thoroughly developed in the original plays that have grown into the Second and Third Parts of the 'Henry VI.' The succeeding process to which they were subjected was simply one of technical elaboration and refinement. We have no doubt at all that 'The First Part of Henry VI.' originally existed in a rougher form. Whoever compares it critically with the two Parts of 'The Contention' will perceive that much of the ruggedness which belongs to those dramas has no place in this first drama of the series. For instance, it has very few Alexandrines; the use of old words, such as "belike," is very rare, that word being frequently found in 'The Contention;' and the versification altogether, though certainly more monotonous, is what we may call more correct than that of 'The Contention.' How it could ever have been held that this play has undergone *no* repair, is to us one of the many marvellous things that belong to the ordinary critical estimation of it. Be the changes it has passed through few or many, it is evident to us that all the material parts of the original structure are still to be found. But whatever rapidity of action, truth of characterization, and correctness of style it may possess, in a pre-eminent degree, as compared with other plays of the period, it is not, in all the higher essentials of dramatic excellence, to be placed in the same scale as the two Parts of 'The Contention.' It wants, speaking generally,

* In 1594 was published 'The first Part of the Contention between the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster.' This play, in the entire conduct of the scenes, and a great part of the dialogue, is the 'Second Part of Henry VI.' In 1595 appeared 'The true Tragedy of Richard Duke of York,' known also as 'the Second Part of the Contention.' This is the parallel play to the 'Third Part of Henry VI.' The first Part of 'Henry VI.' originally appeared in the folio of 1623.

the high poetry of those plays—not the mere poetry of description, but the teeming thought, the figurative expression, the single word that conveys a complex idea with more distinctness and much more force than the periphrasis of ordinary writers. It results from this very defect that 'The First Part of Henry VI.' has far less obscurity than the succeeding parts. We may venture to say that there is no play of the whole number received as Shakspeare's which exhibits so few passages of doubtful meaning; and this we hold to be a consequence of its being one of his very earliest performances. All the very early plays possess this attribute, more or less. We can understand how a poet of Shakspeare's extraordinary judgment—the quality which we hold to be as remarkable in him as his invention—should, surrounded as he was with dramatic productions teeming with extravagance and unreality of every description, first endeavour to be correct and to be intelligible. But of what other author, who belonged to the transition-state of the drama, can it be said that intelligibility was a characteristic? Who else has attempted to give us the familiar without the vapid or the gross, and the dignified without the inflated? Who, in a word, of our dramatic writers between 1585 and 1590, trusted to the power of the real?

The value of any work of art is to be tested rather by its effect as a whole than by the effect of particular parts. And this especially applies to a work of dramatic art; for parts even fine in themselves may, with reference to the entire effect of a drama, be blemishes instead of beauties. No writer that ever lived has approached Shakspeare in the skill by which the whole is made to produce its entire and undisturbed effect. He is thus, of all poets, the least to be appreciated from the study alone of "specimens." For, although these may be sufficient to place him in the highest rank, in comparison with the "specimens" of other writers, yet, separated from the parts by which they are naturally surrounded, they furnish no idea of the extraordinary harmony with which they are blended with all that has preceded and all

that follows them. Shakspeare, beyond every other dramatic writer, possesses the power of sustaining the continuous idea, which imparts its own organization and vitality to the most complex and apparently incongruous action,—to the most diversified and seemingly isolated characters.

Without understanding the paramount idea, the manufacturers of acting plays have proceeded to the abridgment and transposition of Shakspeare's scenes, and have produced such monsters as Davenant's 'Tempest' and Tate's 'Lear.' It is in the same spirit that the critics upon the 'Henry VI.' hold that these dramas are greatly inferior to Shakspeare's other performances; and hence the theory of their spuriousness. But, as we believe, the informing idea in all its dramatic power and unity runs through the entire series of these plays, and, as we think, is most especially manifest in the two Parts of 'The Contention.' For what is the effect which the poet intended in these two dramas to produce on the minds of his audience? There was to be shown a dark chaotic mass of civil tumult, of factious strifes, of fierce and bloody hatreds, of desperate ambition, of political profligacy, of popular ignorance, of weak government. The struggle was to be continued, while each faction had its alternations of success; each was to exhibit the same demoralising effects of the same frenzied ambition which drove them onward; the course of events was sometimes to be determined by energy and sometimes by accident; weakness was to throw away what power and good fortune had won; alliances were to be broken by causeless quarrels, and cemented by motiveless treachery; and, lastly, when the ever-present fate which seemed to dominate over this wild and fearful confusion gave the final battle to the feeble, and hurled down the mighty from the car of victory, there was to be superfluous guilt in the hour of success, and the conquerors were to march to thrones with their hands red with murder. But what principle was to hold together all these apparently incongruous elements? How were the separate scenes, each so carelessly; as it were, linked with the other,

to produce one overwhelming interest, stimulate one prevailing curiosity, satisfy one irresistible craving in the spectators? The stern majesty of justice was made to preside over the course of these wild and mysterious events—sometimes dimly seen, sometimes wholly hidden, but rising up ever and anon out of thick clouds and darkness, to assert the overruling power of some government of events, more equal, more enduring, more mighty, and more fearful, than the direction which they received from human energy, and passion, and intellect, and guilt. Shakspeare has *never* chosen to exhibit this tremendous agency after that unnatural manner which we are accustomed to call *poetical* justice—he develops the progress of that *real* justice which *sometimes*, for inscrutable purposes, permits the good to be forsaken, to be humiliated, to be crushed, to perish, but which invariably follows the guilty with some dismal retribution, more striking if it be seen,—more terrible if it be hidden from all eyes, and revealed only in the innermost heart of the peace-abandoned. *He* never distorts and vulgarises the manifest workings of a providential arbitrement of human actions, by heaping every calamity upon the good man,—searing his heart with tortures which leave the wheel and the stake but little to inflict,—and then, hey presto, turning the dirge into a dance—the prison into a palace,—whilst the tyrant and the villain has his profitable account settled with a stab or an execution. *Poetical* justice is "your only jig-maker." But Shakspeare never forgets that in the general course of *actual* events there is a slow but unerring retribution that follows the violation of justice, evolved, not by the shifting of a scene, but out of the natural consequences of the events themselves. Let us endeavour to trace how this paramount idea is brought out in the dramas before us.

Sir Walter Scott somewhere speaks, through one of his characters, of the "Lancastrian prejudices" of Shakspeare. The great novelist had probably in his mind the delineation of Richard. But it would be difficult, we think, to have conducted the entire chronicle history of 'The Contention between the two

famous houses of York and Lancaster' with more rigid impartiality. This just and tolerant view of human events and characters constitutes one of the most remarkable peculiarities of the mind of Shakspeare; and its manifestation in the drama before us furnishes one of the many proofs, and to us not the least convincing, that they could alone have emanated from that mind. For, let us turn to the very first scenes of these dramas, and we shall find the character of the Lancastrian Margaret gradually displaying itself in an aptitude for bold and dangerous intrigue, founded upon her pride and impatience of a rival in authority. The Duchess of Gloster is tempted by her own weak ambition to meddle with the "lime-twigs" that have been set for her. But it is the passionate hatred of Margaret, lending itself to schemes of treachery and bloodshed, that drives on the murder of the "good Duke Humphrey." With the accomplices of Margaret the retribution is instant and terrible. The banished Suffolk falls, not by the hand of the law, but by some mysterious agency which appears to have armed against him a power mightier than the law, which seizes upon its victim with an obdurate ferocity, and hurries him to death in the name of a wild and irregular justice. To the second great conspirator against the Protector the retribution is even more fearful—the death, not of violence but of mental torture, far more terrible than any bodily pain. The "Look, look, comb down his hair!"* of Beaufort speaks of sufferings far higher than those of the proud Suffolk, when the pirate had denounced him as "Poole, puddle, kennel, sink, and dirt!" and he saw the prophecy of the "cunning wizard" about to be accomplished. The justice which followed the other conspirator against Humphrey had not yet unsheathed its sword. His punishment was postponed till the battle-day of Wakefield.

The scenes of the first four acts of 'The First Part of the Contention' may appear to a superficial observation to be very slightly

* In the passages which we quote, the reader will find some slight differences in the text of the Second and Third Parts of 'Henry VI.' We quote from the older plays.

linked with the after-scenes of the great contest of the Roses. But it was the object of the poet to show the beginnings of faction, continued onward in the same form from the previous drama. The Protectorship was essentially a government of weakness, through the jealousies which it engendered and the intrigues by which it was surrounded. But the removal of the Protector left the government more weak, subjected as it then was to the capricious guidance of the imbecility of Henry and the violence of Margaret. Of such a rule popular commotions are the natural fruit. The author of 'The Contention,' with a depth of political wisdom which Shakspeare invariably displays, has exhibited the insurrection of Cade, not as a revolt for specific objects, such as the removal of public oppressors or the redress of popular wrongs, but as a movement of the most brutal ignorance, instigated by a coarse ruffian, upon promises which could be realised in no condition of society, and for ends which proposed only such peace and security as would result from the overthrow of all rule and order. "You shall have seven halfpenny loaves for a penny, and the three-hooped pot shall have ten hoops, and it shall be felony to drink small beer," is the proper prologue to "Henceforward all things shall be in common, and in Cheapside shall my palfrey go to grass." The same political sagacity has given us the inconstancy, as well as the violence, of the multitude. Nor are these remarkable scenes an episode only in this great dramatic history. Cade perishes, but York is in arms. The civil war is founded upon the popular tumult.

The civil war is begun. The Yorkists are in the field. The poet has delineated the character of their leader with a nice discrimination, and certainly without any of the coarseness of partisanship. He conveys to us that York is ambitious and courageous, but somewhat weak, and, to a great extent, a puppet in the hands of others. In the early scene in the Temple Garden his ambition is rashly discovered, in a war of words, commenced in accident and terminated in fruitless passion. That ambition first contents itself "to be restored to my blood;"

and, when Harry grants his wish, the submission of the half-rebel is almost grovelling :—

“Thy humble servant vows obedience,
And humble service, till the point of death.”

The full development of his ambition is the result of his estimation of the character of Henry, and his sense of the advantage which he derives from the factions which grow out of an imbecile government. But he is still only a dissembler, exciting his fancies with some shadowy visions of a crown, lending himself to the dark intrigues of his natural and avowed enemies, and calling up the terrible agency of popular violence, reckless of any consequences so that confusion be produced :—

“From Ireland then comes York again
To reap the harvest which that coystroll sow’d.”

The schemes of York are successful, and he is at length in arms ; but he still dissembles. When Buckingham demands “the reason of these arms,” and addresses him as a “subject, as I am,” his wounded pride has vent in the original play in a few words. But Shakspeare, in his additions to the sketch, has marked the inflated weakness of York’s character by putting in his mouth words of “sound and fury” which he is afraid to speak aloud :—

“O, I could hew up rocks, and fight with flint,
I am so angry at these abject terms;
And now, like Ajax Telamonius,
On sheep or oxen could I spend my fury!
I am far better born than is the king;
More like a king, more kingly in my thoughts:
But I must make fair weather yet awhile,
Till Henry be more weak, and I more strong.”

Passion, however, precipitates that decided movement which prudence would have avoided ; and the battle of St. Alban’s is the result.

The poet has now fairly opened

“The purple testament of bleeding war.”

Smothered dislikes are now to become scorching hatreds ; and the domestic affections, bruised and wounded, are to be the stimulants of the most savage revenge. Shakspeare has, with wonderful knowledge of human nature, made the atrocities of Clifford spring from the very depths of his filial love. The original

conception is found in ‘The Contention ;’ but its elaboration in ‘The Second Part of Henry VI.’ is perhaps unsurpassed in beauty of expression by any passage of our matchless poet :—

“Wast thou ordain’d, dear father,
To lose thy youth in peace, and to achieve
The silver livery of advised age,
And in thy reverence, and thy chair-days, thus
To die in ruffian battle? Even at this sight
My heart is turn’d to stone: and while ’t is
mine
It shall be stony.”

With this preparation the savage ferocity of Clifford, in the murder of Rutland, is rendered less revolting :—

“Thy father slew my father, therefore die.”

This is the key to his cold-blooded participation in the butchery of York :—

“There ’s for my oath, there ’s for my father’s
death.”

And what a real exhibition is this of the foulest crimes perpetrated under gentle impulses, where ill-regulated love and hate keep together as twin-sisters! But this is chivalry. Here, even the kindly affections have an aspect of intense selfishness ; and “fierce wars and faithful loves” spring from the same want of the principle of self-control, and the same ignorance of the duties of a large and comprehensive charity. The partisanship of chivalry, displaying itself in bold adventure and desperate courage, looks to be something high and glorious. But it is the same blind emanation of self-love as the factious partisanship of modern politics, in which the leader and the serf are equally indifferent to the justice of the quarrel, and equally regardless of the ends by which victory is to be achieved. Shakspeare has given us every light and shadow of the partisanship of chivalry in his delineation of the various characters in these two wonderful dramas. Apart and isolated from all active agency in the quarrel stands out the remarkable creation of Henry. The poet, with his instinctive judgment, has given the King a much higher character than the chroniclers assign to him. Their relations leave little doubt upon our minds that this imbecility was

very nearly allied to utter incapacity; and that the thin partition between weakness and idiocy was sometimes wholly removed. But Shakspeare has never painted Henry under this aspect; he has shown us a king with virtues unsuited to the age in which he lived; with talents unfitted for the station in which he moved; contemplative amidst friends and foes hurried along by a distempered energy; peaceful under circumstances that could have no issue but in appeals to arms; just in thought, but powerless to assert even his own sense of right amidst the contests of injustice which hemmed him in. The entire conception of the character of Henry, in connexion with the circumstances to which it was subjected, is to be found in the Parliament-scene of 'The Third Part of Henry VI.' This scene is copied from 'The Contention,' with scarcely the addition or alteration of a word. We may boldly affirm that none but Shakspeare could have depicted with such marvellous truth the weakness, based upon a hatred of strife—the vacillation, not of imbecile cunning, but of clear-sighted candour—the assertion of power through the influence of habit, but of a power trembling even at its own authority—the glimmerings of courage utterly extinguished by the threats of "armed men," and proposing compromise even worse than war. We request our readers to peruse this scene, and endeavour to recollect if any poet besides Shakspeare ever presented such a reality in the exhibition of a mind whose principles have no coherency and no self-reliance; one moment threatening and exhorting his followers to revenge, the next imploring them to be patient; now urging his rival to peace, and now threatening war; turning from the assertion of his title to acknowledge its weakness; and terminating his display of "words, frowns, and threats" with

"Let me but reign in quiet while I live."

It was weakness such as this which inevitably raised up the fiery partisans which the poet has so wonderfully depicted; the bloody Clifford—the "she-wolf of France"—the dissembling York—the haughty Warwick—the voluptuous Edward—and, last and most ter-

rible of all, *he* that best explains his own character, "I am myself alone."

One by one the partisans that are thus marshalled by the poet in the Parliament-scene of London are swept away by the steady progress of that justice which rides over their violence and their subtlety. The hollow truce is broken. Margaret is ready to assail York in his castle; York is prepared for the field, having learned from the precocious sophist Richard how "an oath is of no moment." Now are let loose all the "dogs of war." The savage Clifford strikes down the innocent Rutland; the more savage Margaret dips her napkin in his blood. York perishes under the prolonged retribution that awaited the ambition that dallied with murder and rebellion. Clifford, to whom nothing is so odious as "harmful pity," falls in the field of Towton, where the son was arrayed against the father, and the father against the son; and the king, more "woe-begone" than the unwilling victims of ambition, moralises upon the "happy life" of the "homely swain." The great actors of the tragedy are changed. Edward and Richard have become the leaders of the Yorkists, with Warwick, "the king-maker," to rest upon. Henry has fled to Scotland; Margaret to France. Then is unfolded another leaf of that Sibylline book. Edward is on the throne careless of everything but self-gratification; despising his supporters, offending even his brothers. Warwick takes arms against him; Clarence deserts to Warwick; Richard alone remains faithful, sneering at his brother, and laughing in the concealment of his own motives for fidelity. Edward is a fugitive, and finally a captive; but Richard redeems him, and Clarence again cleaves to him. The second revolution is accomplished. The "king-maker" yields his "body to the earth" in the field of Barnet; Margaret and her son become captives in the plains near Tewksbury. Then comes the terrible hour to the unhappy queen—that hour which she foresaw not when she gave the "bloody napkin" to the wretched York—that hour whose intensity of suffering reached its climax of expression in "You have no children." But Richard is fled

"To make a bloody supper in the Tower."

The three that stab the defenceless Edward equally desire another murder; but *one* is to do the work. It is accomplished.

And here then, according to the critical authorities that we have long followed in England, rested the history of 'The Contention of the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster,' as far as the original author carried that history. It was to conclude with deeds of violence, as fearful and as atrocious as any we have yet witnessed. The slaughter of Rutland by the Lancastrian Clifford was to find its parallel in the stabbing of Edward by the three brothers of York; the butchery of York, amidst the taunts and execrations of Margaret and her followers, was to be equalled by the sudden murder of the desolate Henry in his prison-house. There was to be no retribution for these later crimes. The justice which had so long presided over this eventful story was now to sleep. If there was vengeance in reserve, it was to be distant and shadowy. The scene was to close with "stately triumphs;" "drums and trumpets" were to sound; Hope was to display to the conqueror her visions of "lasting joy." If the poet had here closed his chronicle, he would have been an imperfect interpreter of his own idea. We open another leaf of the same volume, and all becomes clear and consistent.

To understand the character of the Richard III. of Shakspeare, we must have traced its development by the author of 'The Contention.' The character was a creation of the early author; the unity was preserved between the last of these four dramas, which everybody admits to be the work of the "greatest name in all literature," in an unbroken link with the previous drama, which everybody has been in the habit of assigning to some obscure and very inferior writer. We are taught to open 'The Life and Death of King Richard III.,' and to look upon the extraordinary being who utters the opening lines as some new creation, set before us in the perfect completeness of self-formed villainy. We have not learnt to trace the growth of the mind of this bold bad man; to see how his bravery became gradually darkened with ferocity; how his prodigious

talents insensibly allied themselves with cunning and hypocrisy; how, in struggling for his house, he ultimately proposed to struggle for himself; how, in fact, the bad ambition would be naturally kindled in his mind, to seize upon the power which was sliding from the hands of the voluptuous Edward, and the "simple, plain Clarence." He that wrote—

"I have no brothers, I am like no brothers;
And this word *love*, which greybeards term
divine,
Be resident in men like one another,
And not in me; I am myself alone"—

prepared the way for the Richard that was to tell us—

"If I fail not in my deep intent,
Clarence hath not another day to live:
Which done, God take King Edward to his
mercy,
And leave the world for me to bustle in!"

The poet of the 'Richard III.' goes straightforward to his object; for he has made all the preparation in the previous dramas. No gradual development is wanting of the character which is now to sway the action. The struggle of the houses up to this point has been one only of violence; and it was therefore anarchical. "The big-boned" Warwick, and the fiery Clifford, alternately presided over the confusion. The power which changed the

"Dreadful marches to delightful measures" seemed little more than accident. But Richard proposed to himself to subject events to his domination, not by courage alone, or activity, or even by the legitimate exercise of a commanding intellect, but by the clearest and coolest perception of the strength which he must inevitably possess who unites the deepest sagacity to the most thorough unscrupulousness in its exercise, and is an equal master of the weapons of force and of craft. The character of Richard is essentially different from any other character which Shakspeare has drawn. His bloody violence is not that of Macbeth; nor his subtle treachery that of Iago. It is difficult to say whether he derives a greater satisfaction from the success of his crimes, or from

the consciousness of power which attends the working of them. This is a feature which he holds in common with Iago. But then he does not labour with a "motiveless malignity," as Iago does. He has no vague suspicions, no petty jealousies, no remembrance of slight affronts, to stimulate him to a disproportioned and unnatural vengeance. He does not *hate* his victims; but they stand in his way, and, as he does not *love* them, they perish. He chuckles in the fortitude which this alienation from humanity confers upon him:—

"Simple, plain Clarence! I do love thee so,
That I will shortly send thy soul to heaven,
If Heaven will take the present at our hands."
Other men, the most obdurate, have been wrought upon by a mother's tears and a mother's prayers: they are to him a jest:—

"Madam, my mother, I do cry you mercy,
I did not see your grace:—Humbly on my
knee

I crave your blessing.

Duch. God bless thee, and put meekness in
thy breast,

Love, charity, obedience, and true duty!

Glo. Amen; and make me die a good old
man!

That is the butt-end of a mother's blessing;

I marvel that her grace did leave it out."

Villains of the blackest dye disguise their crimes even from themselves. Richard shrinks not from their avowal to others, for a purpose. The wooing of Lady Anne is, perhaps, the boldest thing in the Shakspearean drama. It is perpetually on the verge of the impossible; yet the marvellous consistency of character with which it is conducted renders the whole of this conduct probable, if we once get over the difficulty which startles Richard himself:—

"Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?"

His exultation at having accomplished his purpose by the sole agency of "the plain devil, and dissembling looks" is founded on his unbounded reliance upon his mental powers; and that reliance is even strong enough to afford that he should abate so much of his self-love as to be joyous in the contemplation of his own bodily deformity.

It is the result of the peculiar organization of Richard's mind, formed as it had been by circumstances as well as by nature, that he invariably puts himself in the attitude of one who is playing a part. It is this circumstance which makes the character (clumsy even as it has been made by the joinery of Cibber) such a favourite on the stage. It cannot be over-acted. It was not without a purpose that the author of 'The Contention' put in the mouth of Henry

"What scene of death hath Roscius now to act?"

Burbage, the original player of Richard, according to Bishop Corbet's description of his host at Bosworth*, was identified with him. This aptitude for subjecting all his real thoughts and all his natural impulses to the exigencies of the scene of life in which he was to play the chief part, equally govern his conduct whether he is wooing Lady Anne—or denouncing the relations of the queen—or protesting before the king,

"'T is death to me to be at enmity"—

or mentioning the death of Clarence as a thing of course—or begging the strawberries from the Bishop of Ely when he is meditating the execution of Hastings—or appearing on the Tower walls in rusty armour—or rejecting the crown which the citizens present to him—or dismissing Buckingham with

"Thou troublest me, I am not in the vein"—

or soliciting the mother of his murdered nephews to win for him her daughter,

"As I intend to prosper and repent."

* "Mine host was full of ale and history,
And in the morning when he brought us nigh,
Where the two Roses join'd, you would suppose
Chaucer ne'er made the Romaunt of the Rose.
Hear him. See you yon wood? There Richard lay
With his whole army. Look the other way,
And lo! while Richmond in a bed of gorse
Encamp'd himself all night, and all his force,
Upon this hill they met. Why, he could tell
The inch where Richmond stood, where Richard fell.
Besides what of his knowledge he could say,
He had authentic notice from the play;
Which I might guess by marking up the ghosts,
And policies not incident to hosts;
But chiefly by that one perspicuous thing
Where he mistook a player for a king.
For when he would have said, King Richard died,
And call'd, A horse! a horse! he Burbage cried."

It is only in the actual presence of a powerful enemy that Richard displays any portion of his *natural* character. His bravery required no dissimulation to uphold it. In his last battle-field he puts forth all the resources of his intellect in a worthy direction. But the retribution is fast approaching. It was not enough for offended justice that he should die as a hero: the terrible tortures of conscience were to precede the catastrophe. The drama has exhibited all it could exhibit—the palpable images of terror haunting a mind already anticipating the end. “Radcliff, I fear, I fear,” is the first revelation of the true inward man to a fellow-being. But the terror is but momentary:—

“Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls.”

To the last the poet exhibits the supremacy of Richard's intellect, his ready talent, and his unwearied energy. The tame address of Richmond to his soldiers, and the spirited exhortation of Richard, could not have been the result of accident.

It appears to us, then, that the complete development of the character of Richard was absolutely essential to the completion of the great idea upon which the poet constructed these four dramas. There was a man to be raised up out of the wild turbulence of the long contest—not cruel, after the mere fashion of a Clifford's cruelty—not revengeful, according to the passionate impulses of the revenge of a Margaret and of an Edward—not false and perjured, in imitation of the irresolute weakness of a Clarence—but one who was cruel, and revengeful, and treacherous, upon the deepest premeditation and with the most profound hypocrisy. That man was also to be so confident in his intellectual power, that no resolve was too daring to be acted upon, no risk too great to be encountered. Fraud and force were to go hand in hand, and the one was to exterminate what the other could not win. This man was to be an instrument of that justice which was to preside to the end of this “sad eventful history.” By his agency was the house of York to fall, as the house of Lancaster had fallen. The innocent by him were to be

swept away with the guilty. Last of all, the Fate was to be appeased—the one great criminal was to perish out of the consequences of his own enormities.

It is an observation of Horace Walpole that Shakspeare, in his ‘Richard III.,’ “seems to deduce the woes of the house of York from the curses which Queen Margaret had vented against them.” It was the faith of Margaret that curses were all-powerful:—

“I'll not believe but they ascend the sky,
And there awake God's gentle-sleeping peace.”*

This was the poetical faith of the author of these dramas—the power of the curse was associated with the great idea of a presiding Fate. But Margaret's were not the only curses. Richard himself, in one passage, where he appears to make words exhibit thoughts and not conceal them, refers to the same power of a curse—that of his father, insulted in his death-hour by the scorns of Margaret, and moved to tears by her atrocious cruelty. This is the assertion of the equal justice which is displayed in the dramatic issue of these fearful events; not justice upon the house of York alone, which Horace Walpole thinks Shakspeare strove to exhibit in deference to Tudor prejudices, but justice upon the house of Lancaster as well as the house of York, for those individual crimes of the leaders of each house that had made a charnel-ground of England. When that justice had asserted its supremacy, tranquillity was to come. The poet has not chosen to exhibit the establishment of law and order in the astute government of Henry VII.; but in his drama of ‘Henry VIII.’ he has carried us onward to a new state of things, when the power of the sword was at an end. He came as near to his own times as was either safe or fitting; but he contrasts his own times with the days of civil fury, in a prophetic view of the reign of Elizabeth:—

“In her days, every man shall eat in safety,
Under his own vine, what he plants; and sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours.”†

* ‘Richard III.,’ Act I., Scene III.

† ‘Henry VIII.,’ Act V., Scene IV.

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

KING JOHN.

THERE can be no doubt that Shakspeare's 'King John' is founded on a former play. That play, which consists of two Parts, is entitled 'The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England, with the Discoverie of King Richard Cordelion's base son, vulgarly named the Bastard Fauconbridge; also the death of King John at Swinstead Abbey.'—This play was first printed in 1591. The first edition has no author's name in the title-page;—the second, of 1611, has, "Written by W. Sh.;"—and the third, of 1622, gives the name of "William Shakspeare." We think there can be little hesitation in affirming that the attempt to fix this play upon Shakspeare was fraudulent; yet Steevens, in his valuable collection of "Twenty of the Plays" that were printed in quarto, says, "the author (meaning Shakspeare) seems to have been so thoroughly dissatisfied with this play as to have written it almost entirely anew." Steevens afterwards receded from this opinion. Coleridge, too, in the classification which he attempted in 1802, speaks of the old 'King John' as one of Shakspeare's "transition-works—not his, yet of him." The German critics agree in giving the original authorship to Shakspeare. Tieck holds that the play first printed in the folio of 1623 is amongst the poet's latest works—not produced before 1611; and that production, he considers, called forth a new edition of the older play, which he determines to have been one of the earliest works of Shakspeare. Ulrici holds that 'The Troublesome Reign of King John' was written very soon after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, which is shown by its zeal against

Catholicism, which he describes as fanatical, by its glowing patriotism and warlike feelings; and he also assigns it for the most part to Shakspeare. But he believes that the poet here wrought upon even an older production, or that it was written in companionship with some other dramatic author. In the comic scenes, particularly those between Faulconbridge and the monks and nuns, he can discover little of Shakspeare's "facetious grace," but can trace only rudeness and vulgarity. He suffered, however, says Ulrici, the scenes to remain, because they suited the humour of the people. Ulrici perceives, further, a marked difference in the style of this old play and the undoubted works of our poet. In the greater portion, he maintains, the language and characterization are worthy of the great master. Still it is a youthful labour—imperfect, feeble, essentially crude. He considers that the notice of Meres applies to this elder performance. It is a transition to the 'Henry VI.,' in which Shakspeare is more himself. Horn is more decided. In this old play Shakspeare, in his opinion, manifested his knowledge of the relations between poetry and history, and in his youthful hand wielded the magic wand which was to become so potent in his riper years.

Assuming that Shakspeare did not write the 'King John' of 1591, it is impossible now, except on very general principles, to determine why a poet, who had the authentic materials of history before him, and possessed beyond all men the power of moulding those materials, with reference to a dramatic action, into the most complete and beautiful

forms, should have subjected himself, in the full vigour and maturity of his intellect, to a general adherence to the course of the conventional "history" of the stage. But so it is. The 'King John' of Shakspeare is not the 'King John' of the historians whom Shakspeare had unquestionably studied; it is not the 'King John' of his own imagination, casting off the trammels which a rigid adoption of the facts of those historians would have imposed upon him; but it is the 'King John,' in the conduct of the story, in the juxtaposition of the characters, and in the catastrophe—in the historical truth, and in the historical error—of the play which preceded him some few years. This, certainly, was not an accident. It was not what, in the vulgar sense of the word, is called a plagiarism. It was a submission of his own original powers of seizing upon the feelings and understanding of his audience, to the stronger power of *habit* in the same audience. The history of John had been familiar to them for almost half a century. The familiarity had grown out of the rudest days of the drama, and had been established in the period of its comparative refinement which immediately preceded Shakspeare. The old play of 'The Troublesome Reign' was, in all likelihood, a vigorous graft upon the trunk of an older play, which "occupies an intermediate place between moralities and historical plays,"—that of 'Kynge Johan,' by John Bale, written probably in the reign of Edward VI. Shakspeare, then, had to choose between forty years of stage tradition and the employment of new materials. He took, upon principle, what he found ready to his hand. But upon this theory, that 'The Troublesome Reign' is by another poet, none of the transformations of classical or oriental fable, in which a new life is transfused into an old body, can equal this astonishing example of the life-conferring power of a genius such as Shakspeare's. On the other hand, if 'The Troublesome Reign' be a very early play by Shakspeare himself (and we doubt this greatly), the undoubted 'King John' offers the most marvellous example of the resources of a mature intellect, in the creation of characters, in the conduct of a story, and the

employment of language, as compared with the crude efforts of an unformed mind. The contrast is so remarkable that we cannot believe in this theory, even with the whole body of German critics in its favour.

Bale's "pageant" of 'Kynge Johan' has been published by the Camden Society, under the judicious editorship of Mr. J. P. Collier. This performance, which is in two Parts, has been printed from the original manuscript in the library of the Duke of Devonshire. Supposing it to be written about the middle of the sixteenth century, it presents a more remarkable example even than 'Howleglas,' or 'Hick Scorner' (of which an account is given in Percy's agreeable 'Essay on the Origin of the English Stage')*, of the extremely low state of the drama only forty years before the time of Shakspeare. Here is a play written by a bishop; and yet the dirty ribaldry which is put into the mouths of some of the characters is beyond all description, and quite impossible to be exhibited by any example in these pages. We say nothing of the almost utter absence of any poetical feeling—of the dull monotony of the versification—of the tediousness of the dialogue—of the inartificial conduct of the story. These matters were not greatly amended till a very short period before Shakspeare came to "reform them altogether." Our object in mentioning this play is to show that the 'King John' upon which Shakspeare built was, in some degree, constructed upon the 'Kynge Johan' of Bale; and that a traditionary 'King John' had thus possessed the stage for nearly half a century before the period when Shakspeare wrote his 'King John.' There might, without injury to this theory, have been an intermediate play. We avail ourselves of an extract from Mr. Collier's Introduction to the play of Bale:—

"The design of the two plays of 'Kynge Johan' was to promote and confirm the Reformation, of which, after his conversion, Bale was one of the most strenuous and unscrupulous supporters. This design he executed in a manner until then, I apprehend, unknown. He took some of the lead-

* 'Reliques of English Poetry,' vol. 1.

ing and popular events of the reign of King John, his disputes with the pope, the suffering of his kingdom under the interdict, his subsequent submission to Rome, and his imputed death by poison from the hands of a monk of Swinstead Abbey, and applied them to the circumstances of the country in the latter part of the reign of Henry VIII.

* * * * This early application of historical events, of itself, is a singular circumstance, but it is the more remarkable when we recollect that we have no drama in our language of that date in which personages connected with, and engaged in, our public affairs, are introduced. In 'Kynge Johan' we have not only the monarch himself, who figures very prominently until his death, but Pope Innocent, Cardinal Pandulphus, Stephen Langton, Simon of Swinsett (or Swinstead), and a monk called Raymundus; besides abstract impersonations, such as England, who is stated to be a widow, Imperial Majesty, who is supposed to take the reins of government after the death of King John, Nobility, Clergy, Civil Order, Treason, Verity, and Sedition, who may be said to be the Vice, or Jester, of the piece. Thus we have many of the elements of historical plays, such as they were acted at our public theatres forty or fifty years afterwards, as well as some of the ordinary materials of the old moralities, which were gradually exploded by the introduction of real or imaginary characters on the scene. Bale's play, therefore, occupies an intermediate place between moralities and historical plays, and it is the only known existing specimen of that species of composition of so early a date."

That the 'Kynge Johan' of the furious Protestant bishop was known to the writer of the 'King John' of 1591, we have little doubt. Our space will not allow us to point out the internal evidences of this; but one minute but remarkable similarity may be mentioned. When John arrives at Swinstead Abbey, the monks, in both plays, invite him to their treacherous repast by the cry of "Wassail." In the play of Bale we have no incidents whatever beyond the contests between John and the pope—the surrender of

the crown to Pandulph—and the poisoning of John by a monk at Swinstead Abbey. The action goes on very haltingly;—but not so the wordy war of the speakers. A vocabulary of choice terms of abuse, familiarly used in the times of the Reformation, might be constructed out of this curious performance. Here the play of 1591 is wonderfully reformed;—and we have a diversified action, in which the story of Arthur and Constance, and the wars and truces in Anjou, are brought to relieve the exhibition of papal domination and monkish treachery. The intolerance of Bale against the Romish church is the most fierce and rampant exhibition of passion that ever assumed the ill-assorted garb of religious zeal. In the John of 1591 we have none of this violence; but the writer has exhibited a scene of ribaldry, in the incident of Faulconbridge hunting out the "angels" of the monks; for he makes him find a nun concealed in a holy man's chest. This, no doubt, would be a popular scene. Shakspeare has not a word of it. Mr. Campbell, to our surprise, thinks that Shakspeare might have retained "that scene in the old play where Faulconbridge, in fulfilling King John's injunction to plunder religious houses, finds a young smooth-skinned nun in a chest where the abbot's treasures were supposed to be deposited."* When did ever Shakspeare lend his authority to fix a stigma upon large classes of mankind, in deference to popular prejudice? One of the most remarkable characteristics of Shakspeare's 'John,' as opposed to the grossness of Bale and the ribaldry of his immediate predecessor, is the utter absence of all invective or sarcasm against the Romish church, apart from the attempt of the pope to extort a base submission from the English king. Here, indeed, we have his nationality in full power;—but how different is that from fostering hatreds between two classes of one people!

It may amuse such of our readers as have not access to the play of Bale, or to the 'King John' of 1591, to see an example of the different modes in which the two writers treat

* 'Remarks on Life and History of Shakspeare,' prefixed to Moxon's edition, 1838.

the same subject—the surrender of the crown to Pandulph:—

THE 'KYNGE JOHAN' OF BALE.

"*P.* This outward remorse that ye show here evident
Is a great likelihood and token of amendment.
How say ye, Kinge Johan, can ye find now in
your heart
To obey Holy Church and give over your
froward part?

K. J. Were it so possible to hold the enemies
back,
That my sweet England perish not in this
shipwreck.
P. Possible, quoth he! yea, they should go
back indeed,
And their great armies to some other quarters
lead,
Or else they have not so many good blessings
now,
But as many cursings they shall have, I make
God avow.

I promise you, sir, ye shall have special
favour
If ye will submit your self to Holy Church
here.

* * * *

K. J. I have cast in my mind the great dis-
pleasures of war,
The dangers, the losses, the decays, both near
and far;
The burning of towns, the throwing down of
buildings,
Destruction of corn and cattle, with other
things;
Defiling of maids, and shedding of Christian
blood,
With such like outrages, neither honest, true,
nor good.
These things considered, I am compelled this
hour
To resign up here both crown and regal power.

* * * *

K. J. Here I submit me to Pope Innocent
the thred [third],
Desiring mercy of his holy fatherhead.

P. Give up the crown, then, it shall be the
better for ye:
He will unto you the more favourable be."

THE 'KING JOHN' OF 1591.

"*Pandulph.* John, now I see thy hearty
penitence,

I rue and pity thy distrest estate:
One way is left to reconcile thyself,
And only one, which I shall show to thee.
Thou must surrender to the see of Rome
Thy crown and diadem, then shall the pope
Defend thee from th'invasion of thy foes.
And where his holiness hath kindled France,
And set thy subjects' hearts at war with thee,
Then shall he curse thy foes, and beat them
down,

That seek the discontentment of the king.

K. J. From bad to worse, or I must lose
my realm,

Or give my crown for penance unto Rome:
A misery more piercing than the darts
That break from burning exhalations' power.
What, shall I give my crown with this right
hand?

No: with this hand defend thy crown and
thee.

What news with thee?

* * * *

K. J. How now, lord cardinal, what's your
best advice?

These mutinies must be allayed in time,
By policy or headstrong rage at least.
O John, these troubles tire thy wearied soul,
And, like to Luna in a sad eclipse,
So are thy thoughts and passions for this news.
Well may it be, when kings are grieved so,
The vulgar sort work princes' overthrow.

Card. King John, for not effecting of thy
plighted vow,
This strange annoyance happens to thy land:
But yet be reconciled unto the church,
And nothing shall be grievous to thy state."

We might furnish several similar parallels between the 'King John' of 1591, and the 'King John' of Shakspeare, if the general reader would not be likely to weary of such minute criticism. But we may, without risk, select two specimens. The first exhibits the different mode in which the *character* of the Bastard is treated in the two plays. In the play of 1591 he is a bold, mouthing bully, who talks in "Ercles' vein," and somewhat reminds one of "Ancient Pistol." There is not a particle in this character of the irrepressible gaiety—the happy mixture of fun and sarcasm—the laughing words accompanying the stern deeds—which distinguish the Bastard of Shakspeare. We purposely have selected a short

parallel extract; but the passages furnish a key to the principle upon which a dull character is made brilliant. Our poet has let in the sunlight of prodigious animal spirits, without any great intellectual refinement, (how different from Mercutio!) upon the heavy clod that he found ready to his hand:—

THE 'KING JOHN' OF 1591.

Lym. Methinks that Richard's pride and Richard's fall

Should be a precedent t' affright you all.

Bast. What words are these? how do my sinews shake?

My father's foe clad in my father's spoil!

A thousand furies kindle with revenge

This heart that choler keeps a consistory,

Searing my inwards with a brand of hate:

How doth Alecto whisper in mine ears,—

Delay not, Philip, kill the villain straight;

Disrobe him of the matchless monument

Thy father's triumph o'er the savages!

Base herdgroom, coward, peasant, worse than a threshing slave,

What mak'st thou with the trophy of a king?"

SHAKSPERE'S 'KING JOHN.'

Aust. Peace!

Bast. Hear the crier.

Aust. What the devil art thou?

Bast. One that will play the devil, sir, with you,

An 'a may catch your hide and you alone.

You are the hare of whom the proverb goes,

Whose valour plucks dead lions by the beard.

I'll smoke your skin-coat, an I catch you right;

Sirrah, look to 't; i' faith, I will, i' faith.

Blanch. Oh, well did he become that lion's robe,

That did disrobe the lion of that robe!

Bast. It lies as sightly on the back of him As great Alcides' shoes upon an ass:—

But, ass, I'll take that burthen from your back,

Or lay on that shall make your shoulders crack."

The second extract we shall make is for the purpose of exhibiting the modes in which the same passion is dealt with under the same circumstances. The situation in each play is where Arthur exhorts his mother to

be content, after the marriage between Lewis and Blanch, and the consequent peace between John and Philip:—

THE 'KING JOHN' OF 1591.

Art. Madam, good cheer, these drooping languishments

Add no redress to salve our awkward haps:

If Heaven have concluded these events,

To small avail is bitter pensiveness:

Seasons will change, and so our present grief

May change with them, and all to our relief.

Const. Ah, boy, thy years I see are far too green

To look into the bottom of these cares:

But I, who see the poise that weigheth down

Thy weal, my wish, and all the willing means

Wherewith thy fortune and thy fame should mount,—

What joy, what ease, what rest can lodge in me,

With whom all hope and hap do disagree?

Art. Yet ladies' tears, and cares, and solemn shows,

Rather than helps, heap up more work for woes.

Const. If any power will hear a widow's plaint,

That from a wounded soul implores revenge,

Send fell contagion to infect this clime,

This cursed country, where the traitor's breath,

Whose perjury (as proud Briareus)

Beleaguers all the sky with misbelief.

He promised, Arthur, and he sware it too,

To fence thy right, and check thy foeman's pride;

But now, black-spotted perjure as he is,

He takes a truce with Elinor's damn'd brat,

And marries Lewis to her lovely niece,

Sharing thy fortune, and thy birth-day's gift,

Between these lovers: ill betide the match!

And as they shoulder thee from out thine own,

And triumph in a widow's tearful cares,

So Heavens cross them with a thriftless course!

Is all the blood spilt on either part,

Closing the crannies of the thirsty earth,

Grown to a love-game and a bridal feast?"

SHAKSPERE'S 'KING JOHN.'

Art. I do beseech you, madam, be content.

Const. If thou, that bidd'st me be content, wert grim,

Ugly, and sland'rous to thy mother's womb,

Full of unpleasing blots and sightless stains,
Lame, foolish, crooked, swart, prodigious,
Patch'd with foul moles and eye-offending
marks,

I would not care, I then would be content;
For then I should not love thee; no, nor thou
Become thy great birth, nor deserve a crown.
But thou art fair; and at thy birth, dear boy,
Nature and Fortune join'd to make thee great:
Of Nature's gifts thou mayst with lilies boast,
And with the half-blown rose: but Fortune, O!
She is corrupted, changed, and won from thee;
She adulterates hourly with thy uncle John;
And with her golden hand hath pluck'd on
France

To tread down fair respect of sovereignty,
And made his majesty the bawd to theirs.
France is a bawd to Fortune, and King John;
That strumpet Fortune, that usurping John:—
Tell me, thou fellow, is not France forsworn?
Envenom him with words; or get thee gone,
And leave those woes alone, which I alone
Am bound to under-bear.

Sal. Pardon me, madam,
I may not go without you to the kings.

Const. Thou mayst, thou shalt; I will not
go with thee:

I will instruct my sorrows to be proud:
For grief is proud, and makes his owner stoop.
To me, and to the state of my great grief,
Let kings assemble; for my grief's so great,
That no supporter but the huge firm earth
Can hold it up: here I and sorrows sit;
Here is my throne, bid kings come bow to it."

Dr. Johnson, in his preface to Shakspeare, speaking of the division, by the players, of our author's works into comedies, histories, and tragedies, thus defines what, he says, was the notion of a dramatic history in those times: "History was a series of actions, with no other than chronological succession, independent on each other, and without any tendency to introduce and regulate the conclusion." Again, speaking of the unities of the critics, he says of Shakspeare—"His histories, being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws; nothing more is necessary to all the praise which they expect than that the changes of action be so prepared as to be understood, that the incidents be various and affecting, and the

characters consistent, natural, and distinct. No other unity is intended, and, therefore, none is to be sought. In his other works he has well enough preserved the *unity of action*." Taking these observations together, as a general definition of the character of Shakspeare's histories, we are constrained to say that no opinion can be farther removed from the truth. So far from the "unity of action" not being regarded in Shakspeare's histories, and being subservient to the "chronological succession," it rides over that succession whenever the demands of the scene require "a unity of a higher order, which connects the events by reference to the workers, gives a reason for them in the motives, and presents men in their causative character."* It is this principle which in Shakspeare has given offence to those who have not formed a higher notion of an historical play than that the series of actions should be the transcript of a chronicle, somewhat elevated, and somewhat modified, by the poetical form, but "without any tendency to introduce and regulate the conclusion."

The great connecting link of the chain that binds together all the series of actions in the 'King John' of Shakspeare, is *the fate of Arthur*. In this series of actions we find no events that arise out of other causes. From the first to the last scene, the hard struggles and the cruel end of the young Duke of Brittany either led to the action, or form a portion of it, or are the direct causes of an ulterior consequence. We must entreat the indulgence of our readers whilst we endeavour to establish this principle somewhat in detail.

In the whole range of the Shakspearean drama there is no opening scene which more perfectly exhibits the effect which is produced by coming at once, and without the slightest preparation, to the main business of the piece:—

"Now say, Chatillon, what would France with us?"

In three more lines the phrase "borrow'd majesty" at once explains the position of

* Coleridge's 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 160.

John; and immediately afterwards we come to the formal assertion by France of the "most lawful claim" of "Arthur Plantagenet"—

"To this fair island, and the territories;
To Ireland, Poictiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine."

As rapid as the lightning of which John speaks is a defiance given and returned. The ambassador is commanded to "depart in peace;" the king's mother makes an important reference to the "ambitious Constance;" and John takes up the position for which he struggles to the end,—

"Our strong possession, and our right, for us."

The scene of the Bastard is not an episode entirely cut off from the main action of the piece; his loss of "lands," and his "new-made honour," were necessary to attach him to the cause of John. The Bastard is the one partisan who never deserts him.

The second act brings us into the very heart of the conflict on the claim of Arthur. What a Gothic grandeur runs through the whole of these scenes! We see the men of six centuries ago, as they played the game of their personal ambition—now swearing hollow friendships, now breathing stern denunciations;—now affecting compassion for the weak and the suffering, now breaking faith with the orphan and the mother;—now

"Gone to be married, gone to swear a peace;"

now keeping the feast "with slaughtered men;"—now trembling at, and now braving, the denunciations of spiritual power;—and agreeing in nothing but to bend "their sharpest deeds of malice" on unoffending and peaceful citizens, unless the citizens have some "commodity" to offer which shall draw them

"To a most base and vile-concluded peace."

With what skill has Shakspeare, whilst he thus painted the spirit of the chivalrous times,—lofty in words, but sordid in acts,—given us a running commentary which interprets the whole in the sarcasms of the Bastard! But amidst all the clatter of conventional dignity which we find in the speeches of John, and Philip, and Lewis, and

Austria, the real dignity of strong natural affections rises over the pomp and circumstance of regal ambition with a force of contrast which is little less than sublime. In the second act Constance is almost too much mixed up with the dispute to let us quite feel that she is something very much higher than the "ambitious Constance." Yet, even here, how sweetly does the *nature* of Arthur rise up amongst these fierce broils,—conducted at the sword's point with words that are as sharp as swords,—to assert the supremacy of gentleness and moderation:—

"Good my mother, peace!

I would that I were low laid in my grave;
I am not worth this coil that's made for me."

This is the key-note to the great scene of Arthur and Hubert in the fourth act. But in the mean time the maternal terror and anguish of Constance become the prominent objects; and the rival kings, the haughty prelate, the fierce knights, the yielding citizens, appear but as puppets moved by destiny to force on the most bitter sorrows of that broken-hearted mother. We have here the true characteristic of the drama as described by the philosophical critic,—*"fate and will in opposition to each other."* Mrs. Jameson, in her very delightful work, *'The Characteristics of Women,'* has formed a most just and beautiful conception of the character of Constance:—

"That which strikes us as the principal attribute of Constance is *power*—power of imagination, of will, of passion, of affection, of pride: the moral energy, that faculty which is principally exercised in self-control, and gives consistency to the rest, is deficient; or rather, to speak more correctly, the extraordinary development of sensibility and imagination, which lends to the character its rich poetical colouring, leaves the other qualities comparatively subordinate. Hence it is that the whole complexion of the character, notwithstanding its amazing grandeur, is so exquisitely feminine. The weakness of the woman, who by the very consciousness of that weakness is worked up to desperation and defiance, the fluctuations of temper and the bursts of sublime passion, the terrors,

the impatience, and the tears, are all most true to feminine nature. The energy of Constance, not being based upon strength of character, rises and falls with the tide of passion. Her haughty spirit swells against resistance, and is excited into frenzy by sorrow and disappointment; while neither from her towering pride nor her strength of intellect can she borrow patience to submit, or fortitude to endure."

How exquisitely is this feminine nature exhibited when Constance affects to disbelieve the tale of Salisbury that the kings are "gone to swear a peace;" or rather makes her words struggle with her half-belief, in very weakness and desperation!—

"Thou shalt be punish'd for thus frightening me,
For I am sick, and capable of fears;
Oppress'd with wrongs, and therefore full of
fears;
A widow, husbandless, subject to fears;
A woman, naturally born to fears;
And, though thou now confess thou didst but
jest
With my vex'd spirits, I cannot take a truce,
But they will quake and tremble all this day."

Here is the timid helpless woman, sick even at the shadows of coming events; but, when the shadows become realities, the haughty will,

"Like a proud river peering o'er his bounds,"
asserts its supremacy in little matters which are yet within its control:—

"*Sal.* Pardon me, madam,
I may not go without you to the kings.
Const. Thou mayst, thou shalt, I will not
go with thee:
* * * * here I and sorrows sit;
Here is my throne, bid kings come bow to it."

The pride of grief for a while triumphs over the grief itself:—

"Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjured
kings!"

She casts away all fear of consequences, and defies her false friends with words that appear as irrepressible as her tears. When Pandulph arrives upon the scene, she sees the change which his mission is to work, only

through the medium of her own personal wrongs:—

"Good father cardinal, cry thou, amen,
To my keen curses: for, without my wrong,
There is no tongue hath power to curse him
right."

Reckless of what may follow, she, who formerly exhorted Philip,

"Stay for an answer to your embassy,
Lest unadvised you stain your swords with
blood,"

is now ready to encounter all the perilous chances of another war, and to exhort France to fall off from England, even upon her knee "made hard with kneeling." This would appear like the intensity of selfishness, did we not see the passion of the mother in every act and word. It is thus that the very weakness of Constance—the impotent rage, the deceiving hope—become clothed with the dignity that in ordinary cases belongs to patient suffering and reasonable expectations. Soon, however, this conflict of feeling—almost as terrible as the "hysterica passio" of Lear—is swallowed up in the mother's sense of her final bereavement:—

"Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
Then, have I reason to be fond of grief.
Fare you well: had you such a loss as I,
I could give better comfort than you do,

* * * *

O Lord! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son!
My life, my joy, my food, my all the world!
My widow-comfort, and my sorrows' cure!"

Matchless as is the art of the poet in these scenes;—matchless as an exhibition of maternal sorrow only, apart from the whirlwind of conflicting passions that are mixed up with that sorrow;—matchless in this single point of view when compared with the 'Hecuba' which antiquity has left us*, and with the 'Merope' which the imitators of the Greek drama have attempted to revive;

* In the 'Troades' of Euripides.

—are we to believe that Shakspeare intended that our hearts should sustain this laceration, and that the effects should pass away when Constance quits the stage? Are we to believe that he was satisfied that his “incidents should be various and affecting,” but “independent on each other, and without any tendency to produce and regulate the conclusion?” Was there to be no “unity of feeling” to sustain and elevate the action to the end? Was his tragedy to be a mere dance of Fantoccini? No, no. The remembrance of Constance can never be separated from the after-scenes in which Arthur appears; and, at the very last, when the poison has done its work upon the guilty king, we can scarcely help believing that the spirit of Constance hovers over him, and that the echo of the mother’s cries is even more insupportable than the “burn’d bosom” and the “parched lips,” which neither his “kingdom’s rivers” nor the “bleak winds” of the north can “comfort with cold.”

Up to the concluding scene of the third act we have not learnt from Shakspeare to hate John. We may think him an usurper. Our best sympathies may be with Arthur and his mother. But he is bold and confident, and some remnant of the indomitable spirit of the Plantagenets gives him a lofty and gallant bearing. We are not even sure, from the first, that he had not something of justice in his quarrel, even though his mother confidentially repudiates “his right.” In the scene with Pandulph we completely go with him. We have yet to know that he would one day crouch at the feet of the power that he now defies; and he has therefore all our voices when he tells the wily and sophistical cardinal

“That no Italian priest
Shall tithe or toll in our dominions.”

But the expression of *one thought* that had long been lurking in the breast of John sweeps away every feeling but that of hatred, and worse than hatred; and we see nothing, hereafter, in the king, but the creeping, cowardly assassin, prompting the deed which he is afraid almost to name to himself, with the lowest flattery of his instrument, and

showing us, as it were, the sting which wounds, and the slaver which pollutes, of the venomous and loathsome reptile. The

“Come hither, Hubert. O my gentle Hubert,
We owe thee much”—

the

“By Heaven, Hubert, I am almost ashamed
To say what good respect I have of thee—”

make our flesh creep. The warrior and the king vanish. If Shakspeare had not exercised his consummate art in making John move thus stealthily to his purpose of blood—if he had made the suggestion of Arthur’s death what John afterwards pretended it was—“the winking of authority”—the “humour”

“Of dangerous majesty, when, perchance, it
frowns,”

we might have seen him hemmed in with revolted subjects and foreign invaders with something like compassion. But this exhibition of low craft and desperate violence we can never forgive.

At the end of the third act, when Pandulph instigates the Dauphin to the invasion of England, the poet overleaps the historical succession of events by many years, and makes the expected death of Arthur the motive of policy for the invasion:—

“The hearts

Of all his people shall revolt from him,
And kiss the lips of unacquainted change;
And pick strong matter of revolt, and wrath,
Out of the bloody fingers’ ends of John.”

Here is the link which holds together the dramatic action still entire; and it wonderfully binds up all the succeeding events of the play.

In the fourth act the poet has put forth all his power of the pathetic in the same ultimate direction as in the grief of Constance. The theme is not now the affection of a mother driven to frenzy by the circumstances of treacherous friends and victorious foes; but it is the irresistible power of the very helplessness of her orphan boy, triumphing in its truth and artlessness over the evil nature of the man whom John had selected to destroy his victim, as one

"Fit for bloody villainy,
Apt, liable, to be employed in danger."

It would be worse than idle to attempt any lengthened comment on that most beautiful scene between Arthur and Hubert, which carries on the main action of this play. Hazlitt has truly said, "If anything ever was penned, heart-piercing, mixing the extremes of terror and pity, of that which shocks and that which soothes the mind, it is this scene." When Hubert gives up his purpose, we do not the less feel that

"The bloody fingers' ends of John"
have not been washed of their taint :—

"Your uncle must not know but you are dead," tells us, at once, that no relenting of John's purpose had prompted the compassion of Hubert. Pleased, therefore, are we to see the retribution beginning. The murmurs of the peers at the "once again crown'd,"—the lectures which Pembroke and Salisbury read to their sovereign,—are but the preludes to the demand for "the enfranchisement of Arthur." Then come the dissembling of John,—

"We cannot hold mortality's strong hand,"—
and the bitter sarcasms of Salisbury and Pembroke :—

"Indeed we fear'd his sickness was past cure.
Indeed we heard how near his death he was,
Before the child himself felt he was sick."

"This must be answer'd" is as a knell in John's ears. Throughout this scene the king is prostrate before his nobles ;—it is the prostration of guilt without the energy which too often accompanies it. Contrast the scene with the unconquerable intellectual activity of Richard III., who never winces at reproach, seeing only the success of his crimes and not the crimes themselves,—as, for example, his answer in the scene where his mother and the widow of Edward upbraid him with his murders,—

"A flourish, trumpets ! strike alarums, drums !
Let not the heavens hear these tell-tale women
Rail on the Lord's anointed."

The messenger appears from France :—the

mother of John is dead ;—"Constance in a frenzy died ;" the "powers of France" have arrived "under the Dauphin." Superstition is brought in to terrify still more the weak king, who is already terrified with "subject enemies" and "adverse foreigners." The "prophet of Pomfret" and the "five moons" affright him as much as the consequences of "young Arthur's death." He turns upon Hubert in the extremity of his fears, and attempts to put upon his instrument all the guilt of that deed. Never was a more striking display of the equivocations of conscience in a weak and guilty mind. Shakspeare is here the true interpreter of the secret excuses of many a criminal, who would shift upon accessories the responsibility of the deviser of a wicked act, and make the attendant circumstances more powerful for evil than the internal suggestions. When the truth is avowed by Hubert, John does not rejoice that he has been spared the perpetration of a crime, but he is prompt enough to avail himself of his altered position :—

"O haste thee to the peers."

Again he crawls before Hubert. But the storm rolls on.

The catastrophe of Arthur's death follows instantly upon the rejoicing of him who exclaimed, "Doth Arthur live?" in the hope to find a safety in his preservation upon the same selfish principle upon which he had formerly sought a security in his destruction. In a few simple lines we have the sad dramatic story of Arthur's end :—

"The wall is high ; and yet will I leap down :—
Good ground, be pitiful, and hurt me not !—
There's few, or none, do know me ; if they did,
This ship-boy's semblance hath disguised me
quite.
I am afraid ; and yet I'll venture it."

How marvellously does Shakspeare subject all his characters and situations to the empire of common sense ! The Arthur of the old play, after receiving his mortal hurt, makes a long oration about his mother. The great dramatist carries on the now prevailing feeling of the audience by one pointed line :—

"O me ! my uncle's spirit is in these stones."

If any other recollection were wanting, these simple words would make us feel that John was as surely the murderer of Arthur, when the terrors of the boy drove him to an inconsiderate attempt to escape from his prison, as if the assassin, as some have represented, rode with him in the dim twilight by the side of a cliff that overhung the sea, and suddenly hurled the victim from his horse into the engulfing wave; or as if the king tempted him to descend from his prison at Rouen at the midnight hour, and, instead of giving him freedom, stifled his prayers for pity in the waters of the Seine. It is thus that we know the anger of "the distemper'd lords" is a just anger, when, finding Arthur's body, they kneel before that "ruin of sweet life," and vow to it the "worship of revenge." The short scene between Salisbury, Pembroke, the Bastard, and Hubert, which immediately succeeds, is as spirited and characteristic as anything in the play. Here we see "the invincible knights of old" in their most elevated character—fiery, implacable, arrogant, but still drawing their swords in the cause of right, when that cause was intelligible and undoubted. The character of Faulconbridge here rises far above what we might have expected from the animal courage and the exuberant spirits of the Faulconbridge of the former acts. The courage is indeed here beyond all doubt:—

"Thou wert better gall the devil, Salisbury:
If thou but frown on me, or stir thy foot,
Or teach thy hasty spleen to do me shame,
I'll strike thee dead."

But we were scarcely prepared for the rush of tenderness and humanity that accompany the courage, as in the speech to Hubert:—

"If thou didst but consent
To this most cruel act, do but despair,
And, if thou want'st a cord, the smallest
thread
That ever spider twisted from her womb
Will serve to strangle thee; a rush will be
A beam to hang thee on; or, wouldst thou
drown thyself,
Put but a little water in a spoon,
And it shall be as all the ocean,
Enough to stifle such a villain up."

It is this instinctive justice in Faulconbridge,—this readiness to uplift the strong hand in what he thinks a just quarrel,—this abandonment of consequences in the expression of his opinions,—that commands our sympathies for him whenever he appears upon the scene. The motives upon which he acts are entirely the antagonist motives by which John is moved. We have, indeed, in Shakspeare none of the essay-writing contrasts of smaller authors. We have no asserters of adverse principles made to play at see-saw, with reverence be it spoken, like the Moloch and Belial of Milton. But, after some reflection upon what we have read, we feel that he who leapt into Cœur-de-lion's throne, and he who hath "a trick of Cœur-de-lion's face," are as opposite as if they were the *formal* personifications of subtlety and candour, cowardice and courage, cruelty and kindness. The fox and the lion are not more strongly contrasted than John and Faulconbridge; and the poet did not make the contrast by accident. And yet with what incomparable management are John and the Bastard held together as allies throughout these scenes. In the onset the Bastard receives honour from the hands of John,—and he is grateful. In the conclusion he sees his old patron, weak indeed and guilty, but surrounded with enemies,—and he will not be faithless. When John quails before the power of a spiritual tyrant, the Bastard stands by him in the place of a higher and a better nature. He knows the dangers that surround his king:—

"All Kent hath yielded; nothing there holds
out
But Dover castle: London hath received,
Like a kind host, the dauphin and his powers:
Your nobles will not hear you, but are gone
To offer service to your enemy."

But no dangers can daunt his resolution:—

"Let not the world see fear, and sad distrust,
Govern the motion of a kingly eye:
Be stirring as the time; be fire with fire;
Threaten the threat'ner, and outface the brow
Of bragging horror: so shall inferior eyes,
That borrow their behaviours from the great,
Grow great by your example, and put on
The dauntless spirit of resolution."

The very necessity for these stirring words would show us that from henceforth John is but a puppet without a will. The blight of Arthur's death is upon him; and he moves on to his own destiny, whilst Faulconbridge defies or fights with his enemies; and his revolted lords, even while they swear

"A voluntary zeal, and unurged faith,"
to the invader, bewail their revolt, and lament

"That, for the health and physie of our right,
We cannot deal but with the very hand
Of stern injustice and confused wrong."

But the great retribution still moves onward. The cause of England is triumphant; "the lords are all come lack:"—but the king is "poisoned by a monk:"—

"Poison'd,—ill fare;—dead, forsook, cast off:
And none of you will bid the winter come,
To thrust his icy fingers in my maw;
Nor let my kingdom's rivers take their course
Through my burn'd bosom; nor entreat the
north
To make his bleak winds kiss my parched
lips,
And comfort me with cold:—I do not ask you
much,
I beg cold comfort; and you are so strait,
And so ingrateful, you deny me that."

The interval of fourteen years between the death of Arthur and the death of John is

annihilated. Causes and consequences, separated in the proper history by long digressions and tedious episodes, are brought together. The attributed murder of Arthur lost John all the inheritances of the house of Anjou, and allowed the house of Capet to triumph in his overthrow. Out of this grew a larger ambition, and England was invaded. The death of Arthur and the events which marked the last days of John were separated in their cause and effect by time only, over which the poet leaps. It is said that a man who was on the point of drowning saw, in an instant, all the events of his life in connection with his approaching end. So sees the poet. It is his to bring the beginnings and the ends of events into that real union and dependence which even the philosophical historian may overlook in tracing their course. It is the poet's office to preserve a unity of action; it is the historian's to show a consistency of progress. In the chroniclers we have manifold changes of fortune in the life of John after Arthur of Brittany has fallen. In Shakspeare Arthur of Brittany is at once revenged. The heartbroken mother and her boy are not the only sufferers from double courses. The spirit of Constance is appeased by the fall of John. The Niobe of a Gothic age, who vainly sought to shield her child from as stern a destiny as that with which Apollo and Artemis pursued the daughter of Tantalus, may rest in peace.

CHAPTER II.

A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

'A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM' was first printed in 1600. In that year there appeared two editions of the play:—the one published by Thomas Fisher, a bookseller; the other by James Roberts, a printer. The differences between these two editions are very slight. Steevens, in his collection of twenty plays, has reprinted that by Roberts, giving the variations of the edition by

Fisher. It is difficult to say whether both of these were printed with the consent of the author, or whether one was genuine and the other pirated. If the entries at Stationers' Hall may be taken as evidence of a proprietary right, the edition by Fisher is the genuine one, 'A booke called A Mydsomer Nyghte Dreame' having been entered by him Oct. 8, 1600. One thing is perfectly

clear to us—that the original of these editions, whichever it might be, was printed from a genuine copy, and carefully superintended through the press. The text appears to us as perfect as it is possible to be, considering the state of typography in that day. There is one remarkable evidence of this. The prologue to the interlude of the Clowns, in the fifth act, is purposely made inaccurate in its punctuation throughout. The speaker “does not stand upon points.” It was impossible to have effected the object better than by the punctuation of Roberts’s edition; and this is precisely one of those matters of nicety in which a printer would have failed, unless he had followed an extremely clear copy, or his proofs had been corrected by an author or an editor. The play was not reprinted after 1600, till it was collected into the folio of 1623; and the text in that edition differs in few instances, and those very slight ones, from that of the preceding quartos.

Malone has assigned the composition of ‘A Midsummer-Night’s Dream’ to the year 1594. We are not disposed to object to this,—indeed we are inclined to believe that he has pretty exactly indicated the precise year, as far as it can be proved by one or two allusions which the play contains. But we entirely object to the reasons upon which Malone attempts to show that it was one of our author’s “*earliest* attempts in comedy.” He derives the proof of this from “the poetry of this piece, glowing with all the warmth of a youthful and lively imagination, the many scenes which it contains of almost continual rhyme, the poverty of the fable, and want of discrimination among the higher personages.” Malone would place ‘A Midsummer-Night’s Dream’ in the same rank as ‘The Two Gentlemen of Verona,’ ‘Love’s Labour’s Lost,’ and ‘The Comedy of Errors;’ and he supposes all of them written within a year or two of each other. We have no objection to believe that our poet wrote ‘A Midsummer-Night’s Dream’ when he was thirty years of age, that is in 1594. But it so far exceeds the three other comedies in all the higher attributes of poetry, that we cannot avoid repeating here the opinion which we have

before expressed, that he had written these for the stage before his twenty-fifth year, when he was a considerable shareholder in the Blackfriars company, some of them, perhaps, as early as 1585, at which period the vulgar tradition assigns to Shakspeare—a husband, a father, and a man conscious of the possession of the very highest order of talent—the dignified office of holding horses at the theatre door. The year 1594 is, as nearly as possible, the period where we would place ‘A Midsummer-Night’s Dream,’ with reference to our strong belief that Shakspeare’s earliest plays must be assigned to the commencement of his dramatic career; and that two or three even of his great works had then been given to the world in an unformed shape, subsequently worked up to completeness and perfection. But it appears to us a misapplication of the received meaning of words to talk of “the warmth of a youthful and lively imagination” with reference to ‘A Midsummer-Night’s Dream,’ and the Shakspeare of thirty. We can understand these terms to apply to the unpruned luxuriance of the ‘Venus and Adonis;’ but the poetry of this piece, the almost continual rhyme, and even the poverty of the fable, are to us evidences of the very highest art having obtained a perfect mastery of its materials after years of patient study. Of all the dramas of Shakspeare there is none more entirely harmonious than ‘A Midsummer-Night’s Dream.’ All the incidents, all the characters, are in perfect subordination to the will of the poet. “Throughout the whole piece,” says Malone, “the more exalted characters are subservient to the interests of those beneath them.” Precisely so. An unpractised author—one who had not “a youthful and lively imagination” under perfect control,—when he had got hold of the Theseus and Hippolyta of the heroic ages, would have made them ultra-heroical. They would have commanded events, instead of moving with the supernatural influence around them in harmony and proportion. “Theseus, the associate of Hercules, is not engaged in any adventure worthy of his rank or reputation, nor is he in reality an agent throughout the play.”

Precisely so. An immature poet, again, if the marvellous creation of Oberon and Titania, and Puck, could have entered into such a mind, would have laboured to make the power of the fairies produce some strange and striking events. But the exquisite beauty of Shakspeare's conception is, that, under the supernatural influence, "the human mortals" move precisely according to their respective natures and habits. Demetrius and Lysander are impatient and revengeful;—Helena is dignified and affectionate, with a spice of female error;—Hermia is somewhat vain and shrewish. And then Bottom! Who but the most skilful artist could have given us such a character? Of him Malone says, "Shakspeare would naturally copy those manners first with which he was first acquainted. The ambition of a theatrical candidate for applause he has happily ridiculed in Bottom the weaver." A theatrical candidate for applause! Why, Bottom the weaver is the representative of the whole human race. His confidence in his own power is equally profound, whether he exclaims, "Let me play the lion too;" or whether he sings alone, "that they shall hear I am not afraid;" or whether, conscious that he is surrounded with spirits, he cries out, with his voice of authority, "Where's Peas-blossom?" In every situation Bottom is the same,—the same personification of that self-love which the simple cannot conceal, and the wise can with difficulty suppress. Malone thus concludes his analysis of the internal evidence of the chronology of 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream':—"That a drama, of which the principal personages are thus insignificant, and the fable thus meagre and uninteresting, was one of our author's earliest compositions, does not, therefore seem a very improbable conjecture; nor are the beauties with which it is embellished inconsistent with this supposition." The beauties with which it is embellished include, of course, the whole rhythmical structure of the versification. The poet has here put forth all his strength. We venture to offer an opinion that, if any single composition were required to exhibit the

power of the English language for purposes of poetry, that composition would be the 'Midsummer-Night's Dream.' This wonderful model, which, at the time it appeared, must have been the commencement of a great poetical revolution,—and which has never ceased to influence our higher poetry, from Fletcher to Shelley,—was, according to Malone, the work of "the genius of Shakspeare, even in its minority."

Mr. Hallam has, as might be expected, taken a much more correct view of this question than Malone. He places 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream' among the early plays; but, having mentioned 'The Comedy of Errors,' 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona,' 'Love's Labour's Lost,' and 'The Taming of the Shrew,' he adds, "Its superiority to those we have already mentioned affords some presumption that it was written after them."*

'A Midsummer-Night's Dream' is mentioned by Francis Meres in 1598. The date of the first publication of the play, therefore, in 1600, does not tend to fix its chronology. Nor is it very material to ascertain whether it preceded 1598 by three, or four, or five years. The state of the weather in 1593 and 1594, when England was visited with peculiarly ungenial seasons, may have suggested Titania's beautiful description in Act II., Scene 2. The allusion of two lines in Act V. is by no means so clear:—

"The thrice three Muses mourning for the death
Of learning, late deceased in beggary."

This passage was once thought to allude to the death of Spenser. But the misfortunes and the death of Spenser did not take place till 1599. Even if the allusion were inserted between the first production of the piece and its publication in 1600, it is difficult to understand how an elegy on the great poet could have been called

"Some satire, keen and critical."

T. Warton suggested "that Shakspeare here, perhaps, alluded to Spenser's poem entitled 'The Tears of the Muses, on the Neglect and Contempt of Learning.' This piece first

* 'Literature of Europe,' vol. ii. p. 387.

appeared in quarto, with others, 1591." We greatly doubt the propriety of this conjecture, which Malone has adopted. Spenser's poem is certainly a satire in one sense of the word; for it makes the Muses lament that all the glorious productions of men that proceeded from their influence had vanished from the earth. All that

"— was wont to work delight
Through the divine infusion of their skill,
And all that else seemed fair and fresh in sight,
So made by nature for to serve their will,
Was turned now to dismal heaviness,
Was turned now to dreadful ugliness."

Clio complains that mighty peers "only boast of arms and ancestry;" Melpomene, that "all man's life meseems a tragedy;" Thalia is "made the servant of the many;" Euterpe weeps that "now no pastoral is to be heard;" and so on. These laments do not seem to be identical with the

"— mourning for the *death*
Of *learning*, late deceased in *beggary*."

These expressions are too precise and limited to refer to the tears of the Muses for the decay of knowledge and art. We cannot divest ourselves of the belief that some real person, and some real death, were alluded to. May we hazard a conjecture?—Greene, a man of learning, and one whom Shakspeare in the generosity of his nature might wish to point at kindly, died in 1592, in a condition that might truly be called beggary. But how was his death, any more than that of Spenser, to be the occasion of "some satire, keen and critical?" Every student of our literary history will remember the famous controversy of Nash and Gabriel Harvey, which was begun by Harvey's publication, in 1592, of 'Four Letters, and certain Sonnets, especially touching Robert Greene, and other parties by him abused.' Robert Greene was dead; but Harvey came forward, in revenge of an incautious attack of the unhappy poet, to satirize him in his grave—to hold up his vices and his misfortunes to the public scorn—to be "keen and critical" upon "learning, late deceased in beggary." The conjecture which we offer may have

little weight, and the point is certainly of very small consequence.

"This is the silliest stuff that e'er I heard," says Hippolyta, when Wall has "discharged" his part. The answer of Theseus is full of instruction:—"The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them." It was in this humble spirit that the great poet judged of his own matchless performances. He felt the utter inadequacy of his art, and indeed of any art, to produce its due effect upon the mind, unless the imagination, to which it addressed itself, was ready to convert the shadows which it presented into living forms of truth and beauty. "I am convinced," says Coleridge, "that Shakspeare availed himself of the title of this play in his own mind, and worked upon it as a dream throughout." The poet says so, in express words:—

"If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, (and all is mended),
That you have but slumber'd here,
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend."

But to understand this dream—to have all its gay, and soft, and harmonious colours impressed upon the vision—to hear all the golden cadences of its poesy—to feel the perfect congruity of all its parts, and thus to receive it as a truth—we must not suppose that it will enter the mind amidst the lethargic slumbers of the imagination. We must receive it—

"As youthful poets dream
On summer eves by haunted stream."

Let no one expect that the beautiful influences of this drama can be truly felt when he is under the subjection of the literal and prosaic parts of our nature: or, if he habitually refuses to believe that there are higher and purer regions of thought than are supplied by the physical realities of the world. In these cases he will have a false standard by which to judge of this, and of all other high poetry—such a standard as that possessed by a critic—acute, learned, in

many respects wise—Dr. Johnson, who lived in a prosaic age, and fostered in this particular the real ignorance by which he was surrounded. He sums up the merits of 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream,' after this extraordinary fashion:—"Wild and fantastical as this play is, all the parts in their various modes are well written, and give the kind of pleasure which the author designed. Fairies, in his time, were much in fashion: common tradition had made them familiar, and Spenser's poem had made them great." It is perfectly useless to attempt to dissect such criticism: let it be a beacon to warn us, and not a "load-star" to guide us. Old Pepys, with his honest hatred of poetry—"To the King's Theatre, where we saw 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life"—is to us more tolerable.

Mr. Hallam accounts 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream' poetical, more than dramatic; "yet rather so, because the indescribable profusion of imaginative poetry in this play overpowers our senses, till we can hardly observe anything else, than from any deficiency of dramatic excellence. For, in reality, the structure of the fable, consisting as it does of three, if not four actions, very distinct in their subjects and personages, yet wrought into each other without effort or confusion, displays the skill, or rather instinctive felicity, of Shakspeare, as much as in any play he has written." Yet, certainly, with all its harmony of dramatic arrangement, this play is not for the stage—at least not for the modern stage. It may reasonably be doubted whether it was ever eminently successful in performance. The tone of the epilogue is decidedly apologetic, and "the best of this kind are but shadows" is in the same spirit. Hazlitt has admirably described its failure as an acting drama in his own day:—

"The 'Midsummer-Night's Dream,' when acted, is converted from a delightful fiction into a dull pantomime. All that is finest in the play is lost in the representation. The spectacle was grand; but the spirit was evaporated, the genius was fled. Poetry and

the stage do not agree well together. The attempt to reconcile them in this instance fails not only of effect, but of decorum. The *ideal* can have no place upon the stage, which is a picture without perspective: everything there is in the foreground. That which was merely an airy shape, a dream, a passing thought, immediately becomes an unmanageable reality. Where all is left to the imagination (as is the case in reading), every circumstance, near or remote, has an equal chance of being kept in mind, and tells accordingly to the mixed impression of all that has been suggested. But the imagination cannot sufficiently qualify the actual impressions of the senses. Any offence given to the eye is not to be got rid of by explanation. Thus Bottom's head in the play is a fantastic illusion, produced by magic spells: on the stage it is an ass's head, and nothing more; certainly a very strange costume for a gentleman to appear in. Fancy cannot be embodied any more than a simile can be painted; and it is as idle to attempt it as to personate *Wall* or *Moonshine*."

And yet, just and philosophical as are these remarks, they offer no objection to the opinion of Mr. Hallam, that in this play there is no deficiency of dramatic excellence. We can conceive that, with scarcely what can be called a model before him, Shakspeare's early dramatic attempts must have been a series of experiments to establish a standard by which he should regulate what he addressed to a mixed audience. The plays of his middle and mature life, with scarcely an exception, are acting plays; and they are so, not from the absence of the higher poetry, but from the predominance of character and passion in association with it. But even in those plays which call for a considerable exercise of the unassisted imaginative faculty in an audience, such as 'The Tempest,' and 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream,' where the passions are not powerfully roused, and the senses are not held enchained by the interests of a plot, he is still essentially dramatic. What has been called of late years the dramatic poem—that something between the epic and the dramatic which is held to form an apology for whatever of episodic or

incongruous the author may choose to introduce — was unattempted by him. ‘The Faithful Shepherdess’ of Fletcher—a poet who in some things knew how to accommodate himself to the taste of a mixed audience more readily than Shakspeare — was condemned on the first night of its appearance. Seward, one of his editors, calls this the scandal of our nation. And yet it is extremely difficult to understand how the event should have been otherwise; for ‘The Faithful Shepherdess’ is essentially undramatic. Its exquisite poetry was therefore thrown away upon an impatient audience—its occasional indelicacy could not propitiate them. Milton’s ‘Comus’ is in the same way essentially undramatic; and none but such a refined audience as that at Ludlow Castle could have endured its representation. But the ‘Midsummer-Night’s Dream’ is composed altogether upon a different principle. It exhibits all that congruity of parts, that natural progression of scenes, that subordination of action and character to one leading design, that ultimate harmony evolved out of seeming confusion, which constitute the dramatic spirit. With “audience fit, though few,” with a stage not encumbered with decorations, with actors approaching (if it were so possible) to the idea of grace and archness which belong to the fairy troop,—the subtle and evanescent beauties of this drama might not be wholly lost in the representation. But under the most favourable circumstances much would be sacrificed. It is in the closet that we must not only suffer our senses to be overpowered by its “indescribable profusion of imaginative poetry,” but trace the instinctive felicity of Shakspeare in the “structure of the fable.” If the ‘Midsummer-Night’s Dream’ *could* be acted, there can be no doubt how well it would act. Our imagination must amend what is wanting. It is no real objection to this belief that it *has* been acted with surpassing success since these observations were originally written. It was revived at Covent-Garden Theatre as a pantomimic opera, with exquisite scenery, and abundant music, and Oberon and Titania moving in golden chariots amongst silver

clouds, and fairies floating in ether, held up by very invisible strings. And so the poetry was borne for the sake of the sight-seeing and the songs. But, for a just comprehension of Shakspeare’s surpassing beauties in this divine poem, we would rather hear the second scene of Act II. *read* as we have heard it read by a poet, than see the play, accompanied with every scenic propriety and pomp, to show, after all, that “the best *in this kind* are but shadows.”

Schlegel has happily remarked upon this drama, that “the most extraordinary combination of the most dissimilar ingredients seems to have arisen without effort by some ingenious and lucky accident; and the colours are of such clear transparency, that we think the whole of the variegated fabric may be blown away with a breath.” It is not till after we have attentively studied this wonderful production that we understand how solidly the foundations of the fabric are laid. Theseus and Hippolyta move with a stately pace as their nuptial hour draws on. Hermia takes time to pause, before she submits

“To death, or to a vow of single life,”—

secretly resolving “through Athens’ gates to steal.” Helena, in the selfishness of her own love, resolves to betray her friend. Bottom the weaver, and Quince the carpenter, and Snug the joiner, and Flute the bellows-mender, and Snout the tinker, and Starveling the tailor, are “thought fit through all Athens to play in the interlude before the duke and duchess on his wedding-day, at night.” Here are, indeed, “dissimilar ingredients.” They appear to have no aptitude for combination. The artists are not yet upon the scene, who are to make a mosaic out of these singular materials. We are only presented in the first act with the extremes of high and low—with the slayer of the Centaurs, and the weaver, who “will roar you an’t were any nightingale,”—with the lofty Amazon, who appears elevated above woman’s hopes and fears, and the pretty and satirical Hermia, who swears—

“By all the vows that ever men have broke,
In number more than ever women spoke.”

"The course of true love" does not all "run smooth" in these opening scenes. We have the love that is crossed, and the love that is unrequited; and, worse than all, the unhappiness of Helena makes her treacherous to her friend. We have little doubt that all this will be set straight in the progress of the drama; but what Quince and his company will have to do with the untying of this knot is a mystery.

To offer an analysis of this subtle and ethereal drama would, we believe, be as unsatisfactory as the attempts to associate it with the realities of the stage. With scarcely an exception, the proper understanding of the other plays of Shakspeare may be assisted by connecting the apparently separate parts of the action, and by developing and reconciling what seems obscure and anomalous in the features of the characters. But to follow out the caprices and illusions of the loves of Demetrius and Lysander, of Helena and Hermia;—to reduce to prosaic description the consequence of the jealousies of Oberon and Titania;—to trace the Fairy Queen under the most fantastic of deceptions, where grace and vulgarity blend together like the Cupids and Chimeras of Raffaele's Arabesques;—and, finally, to go along with the scene till the illusions disappear—till the lovers are happy, and "sweet bully Bottom" is reduced to an ass of human dimensions;—such an attempt as this would be worse even than unreverential criticism. No,—the 'Midsummer-Night's Dream' must be left to its own influences.

"It is probable," says Steevens, "that the hint of this play was received from Chaucer's 'Knight's Tale.'" We agree with this

opinion. Malone has, with great hardihood, asserted that the part of the fable which relates to the quarrels of Oberon and Titania was "not of our author's invention." He has nothing to show in support of this, but the opinion of Tyrwhitt, that Pluto and Proserpina, in Chaucer's 'Merchant's Tale,' were the true progenitors of Oberon and Titania; that Robert Greene boasts of having performed the King of the Fairies, and that Greene has introduced Oberon in his play of 'James IV.' Malone's assertion, and the mode altogether in which he speaks of this drama, furnish a decisive proof of his incompetence to judge of the higher poetry of Shakspeare. Because the names of Oberon and Titania existed before Shakspeare, he did not invent his Oberon and Titania! The opinion of Mr. Hallam may correct some of the errors which the commentators have laboured to propagate. "The 'Midsummer-Night's Dream' is, I believe, altogether original in one of the most beautiful conceptions that ever visited the mind of a poet, the fairy machinery. A few before him had dealt in a vulgar and clumsy manner with popular superstitions; but the sportive, beneficent, invisible population of the air and earth, long since established in the creed of childhood, and of those simple as children, had never for a moment been blended with 'human mortals' among the personages of the drama. Lyly's 'Maid's Metamorphosis' is probably later than this play of Shakspeare, and was not published till 1600. It is unnecessary to observe that the fairies of Spenser, as he has dealt with them, are wholly of a different race."*

* 'Literature of Europe,' vol. ii. p. 338.

CHAPTER III.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

'ROMEO AND JULIET' was first printed in the year 1597, under the following title:—'An excellent conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet. As it hath been often (with great applause) plaid publiquely, by the right honourable the L. of Hunsdon his Seruants.' The second edition was printed in 1599, under the following title:—'The most excellent and lamentable Tragedie, of Romeo and Juliet. Newly corrected, augmented, and amended: As it hath bene sundry times publiquely acted, by the right Honourable the Lord Chamberlaine his Seruants.'

The subsequent original editions, and the folio of 1623, are founded upon the quarto of 1599, from which they differ very slightly.

The quarto of 1599 was declared to be "newly corrected, augmented, and amended." There can be no doubt whatever that the corrections, augmentations, and emendations were those of the author. There are typographical errors in this edition, and in all the editions, and occasional confusions of the metrical arrangement, which render it more than probable that Shakspeare did not see the proofs of his printed works. But that the *copy*, both of the first edition and of the second, was derived from him, is, to our minds, perfectly certain. We know of nothing in literary history more curious or more instructive than the example of minute attention, as well as consummate skill, exhibited by Shakspeare in correcting, augmenting, and amending the first copy of this play. We would ask, then, upon what canon of criticism can an editor be justified in foisting into a copy, so corrected, passages of the original copy, which the matured judgment of the author had rejected? Essentially the question ought not to be determined by any arbitrement whatever other than the judgment of the author. Even if his corrections did not appear, in every case, to be improvements, we should be still bound to receive them with respect and deference.

We would not, indeed, attempt to establish it as a rule implicitly to be followed, that an author's last corrections are to be invariably adopted; for, as in the case of Cowper's 'Homer,' and Tasso's 'Jerusalem,' the corrections which these poets made in their first productions, when their faculties were in a great degree clouded and worn out, are properly considered as not entitled to supersede what they produced in brighter and happier hours. Mr. Southey has admirably stated the reason for this in the advertisement to his edition of Cowper's 'Homer.' But, in the case of Shakspeare's 'Romeo and Juliet,' the corrections and augmentations were made by him at that epoch of his life when he exhibited "all the graces and facilities of a genius in full possession and habitual exercise of power."* The *augmentations*, with one or two very trifling exceptions, are amongst the most masterly passages in the whole play, and include many of the lines that are invariably turned to, as some of the highest examples of poetical beauty. These augmentations, further, are so large in their amount, that, in Steevens's reprint, the first edition occupies only *seventy-three* pages; while the edition of 1609, in the same volume, printed in the same type as the first edition, occupies *ninety-nine* pages. The *corrections* are made with such exceeding judgment, such marvellous tact, that of themselves they completely overthrow the theory, so long submitted to, that Shakspeare was a careless writer. Such being the case, we consider ourselves justified in treating the labour of Steevens and other editors, in making a patchwork text out of the author's first and second copies, as utterly worthless. We most readily acknowledge our own particular obligations to them; for, unless they had collected a great mass of materials, no modern edition could have been properly undertaken. But we, nevertheless, cannot conceal

* Coleridge's 'Literary Remains.'

our opinion, that as editors they were rash, and as critics they were cold and unimaginative; and we hold it to be the highest duty to attempt to undo what they have done, when they approach their author, as in their manufacture of a text for 'Romeo and Juliet,' "without reverence." We believe, as they did not, "that his own judgment is entitled to more respect than that of any or all his critics;"* and we shall attempt to vindicate that judgment on every occasion, upon the great principle laid down by Bentley:—"The point is not what he *might* have done, but what he *has* done."

In attempting to settle the Chronology of Shakspeare's plays, there are, as in every other case of literary history, two species of evidence to be regarded—the extrinsic and the intrinsic. Of the former species of evidence we have the one important fact that a 'Romeo and Juliet,' by Shakspeare, however wanting in the completeness of the 'Romeo and Juliet' which we now possess, was published in 1597. The enumeration of this play, therefore, in the list by Francis Meres, in 1598, adds nothing to our previous information. In the same manner, the mention of this play by Marston, in his tenth satire, first published in 1599, only shows us how popular it was:—

"Luscus, what's play'd to-day? i' faith, now I know;

I see thy lips abroach, from whence doth flow
Nought but pure Juliet and Romeo."

Of the *positive intrinsic* evidence of the date of 'Romeo and Juliet,' the play, as it appears to us, only furnishes one passage. The Nurse, describing the time when Juliet was weaned, says,

"On Lammas-eve at night shall she be fourteen;
That shall she, marry; I remember it well.

'T is since the earthquake now eleven years;

* * * * *

Sitting in the sun under the dove-house wall,

* * * * *

Shake, quoth the dove-house: 't was no need,
I trow,

To bid me trudge.

And since that time it is eleven years."

* Southey (speaking of Cowper).

All this particularity with reference to the earthquake—

"I never shall forget it,—
Of all the days of the year"—

was for the audience. The poet had to exhibit the minuteness with which unlettered people, and old people in particular, establish a date, by reference to some circumstance which has made a particular impression upon their imagination; but in this case he chose a circumstance which would be familiar to his audience, and would have produced a corresponding impression upon themselves. Tyrwhitt was the first to point out that this passage had, in all probability, a reference to the great earthquake which happened in England in 1580. Stow has described this earthquake minutely in his Chronicle, and so has Holinshed. "On the 6th of April, 1580, being Wednesday in Easter week, about six o'clock toward evening, a sudden earthquake happened in London, and almost generally throughout all England, caused such an amazedness among the people as was wonderful for the time, and caused them to make their earnest prayers to Almighty God!" The circumstances attendant upon this earthquake show that the remembrance of it would not have easily passed away from the minds of the people. The great clock in the palace at Westminster, and divers other clocks and bells, struck of themselves against the hammers with the shaking of the earth. The lawyers supping in the Temple "ran from the tables, and out of their halls, with their knives in their hands." The people assembled at the theatres rushed forth into the fields, lest the galleries should fall. The roof of Christ Church, near to Newgate Market, was so shaken, that a large stone dropped out of it, killing one person, and mortally wounding another, it being sermon-time. Chimneys toppled down, houses were shattered. Shakspeare, therefore, could not have mentioned an earthquake with the minuteness of the passage in the Nurse's speech without immediately calling up some associations in the minds of his audience. He knew the double world in which an excited audience lives,—the half belief in the world

of poetry amongst which they are placed during a theatrical representation, and the half consciousness of the external world of their ordinary life. The ready disposition of every audience to make a transition from the scene before them to the scene in which they ordinarily move,—to assimilate what is shadowy and distant with what is distinct and at hand,—is perfectly well known to all who are acquainted with the machinery of the drama. Actors seize upon the principle to perpetrate the grossest violations of good taste; and authors who write for present applause invariably do the same when they offer us, in their dialogue, a passing allusion, which is technically called a clap-trap. In the case before us, even if Shakspeare had not this principle in view, the association of the English earthquake must have been strongly in his mind when he made the Nurse date from an earthquake. Without reference to the circumstance of Juliet's age,—

“Even or odd, of all days in the year,
Come Lammas-eve at night, shall she be fourteen,”—

he would naturally, dating from the earthquake, have made the date refer to the period of his writing the passage instead of the period of Juliet's being weaned:—
“Then she could stand alone.” But, according to the Nurse's chronology, Juliet had not arrived at that epoch in the lives of children till she was three years old. The very contradiction shows that Shakspeare had another object in view than that of making the Nurse's chronology tally with the age of her nursling. Had he written,

“’T is since the earthquake now *just thirteen* years,”

we should not have been so ready to believe that ‘Romeo and Juliet’ was written in 1593; but as he has written,

“’T is since the earthquake now eleven years,”

in defiance of a very obvious calculation on the part of the Nurse, we have little doubt that he wrote the passage eleven years after the earthquake of 1580, and that, the passage being also meant to fix the attention of an

audience, the play was produced, as well as written, in 1591.

Reasoning such as this would, we acknowledge, be very weak if it were unsupported by evidence deduced from the general character of the performance, with reference to the maturity of the author's powers. But, taken in connection with that evidence, it becomes important. Now, we have no hesitation in believing, although it would be exceedingly difficult to communicate the grounds of our belief fully to our readers, that the alterations made by Shakspeare upon his first copy of ‘Romeo and Juliet,’ as printed in 1597 (which alterations are shown in the second copy as printed in 1599), exhibit differences as to the quality of his mind—differences in judgment—differences in the cast of thought—differences in poetical power—which cannot be accounted for by the growth of his mind during two years only. If the first ‘Romeo and Juliet’ were produced in 1591, and the second in 1599, we have an interval of eight years, in which some of his most finished works had been given to the world. During this period his richness, as well as his sweetness, had been developed; and it is this development which is so remarkable in the superadded passages in ‘Romeo and Juliet.’ We almost fancy that the “Queen Mab” speech will of itself furnish an example of what we mean.

“Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut,
Made by the joiner squirrel, or old grub,
Time out of mind the fairies’ coach-makers.”

These lines are not in the first copy; but how beautifully they fit in after the description of the spokes—the cover—the traces—the collars—the whip—and the waggoner; while, in their peculiarly rich and picturesque effect, they stand out before all the rest of the passage! Then, the “I have seen the day—* * * * ’t is gone, ’t is gone, ’t is gone,” of old Capulet seems to speak more of the middle-aged than of the youthful poet, of whom all the passages by which it is surrounded are characteristic. Again, the lines in the friar's soliloquy, beginning

“The earth, that's Nature's mother, is her tomb,”

look like the work of one who had been reading and thinking more deeply of nature's mysteries than in his first delineation of the benevolent philosophy of this good old man. But, as we advance in the play, the development of the writer's powers is more and more displayed in his additions. The critical reader may trace what has been added by the foot-notes in the 'Pictorial' and 'Library' editions.

Tieck, who, as a translator of Shakspeare, and as a profound and beautiful critic, has done very much for cultivating the knowledge, built upon love, which the Germans possess of our poet, has not been trammelled by Malone and Chalmers, but has placed 'Romeo and Juliet' amongst Shakspeare's early plays. We have no exact statements on this subject by Tieck; but, in a very delightful imaginary scene between Marlowe and Greene, he has made Marlowe describe to his brother dramatist the first performance of 'Romeo and Juliet' of which he had been witness*. Tieck has made this imaginary conversation a vehicle for the most enthusiastic praise of this play. Marlowe describes the performance as taking place at the palace of the Lord Hunsdon. He had expected, he says, that one of his own plays would have been performed; but he found that it was "that old poem, which we have all long known, worked up into a tragedy." After Marlowe has run through the general characteristics of the play, with an eloquent admiration, mingled with deep regret that he himself had been able to approach so distantly the excellence of that "out-sounding mouth, which a godlike muse has herself inspired with the sweetest of her kisses," he thus replies to Greene's inquiry as to who was the poet:—"Wilt thou believe?—one of Henslowe's common comedians, who has already served him many years on very low wages." "And now, if thy fever has passed," said Greene, "let us look on this thing in the broad light. This is merely such a passing apparition as we have seen many of before—admired, gaped at, praised without limit—but full of faults and imperfections, and soon to be altogether forgotten." "The

same thing," said Marlowe, "the same words were whispered to me by my base envy, when I observed the universal delight, the deep emotion, of every spectator. I endeavoured to comfort myself therewith, and again to recover my lost honours in this miserable manner. I fled from the company; and the house-steward, who had acted as an assistant, gave me the manuscript of the play. In my lonely chamber I sat and read the whole night, and read again,—and each time admired the more; for much that had appeared to me episodical or superfluous acquired, on more exact examination, a significance and needful fulness. The good house-steward gave me also another poem, which the author has not yet quite completed, 'Venus and Adonis,' that I might read it in my nightly leisure. My friend, even here, even in this sweet narrative,—even in this soft speech and voluptuous imagery,—in this intoxicating realm, where I, till now, only looked upon likenesses of myself,—I am completely, completely beaten. O this man, this more than mortal! to him (I feel as if my life depends on it) I must become the most intimate friend or the most bitter enemy. Either I will yet find my way to him, or I will succumb to this Apollo, and he may then speak over my outstretched corpse the last words of praise or blame." Tieck has thus decidedly placed the date of the performance of 'Romeo and Juliet' before 1592,—for Greene died in that year, and Marlowe in the year following. The 'Venus and Adonis,' which is here mentioned as not quite completed, was published in 1593. Tieck built his opinion, no doubt, upon internal evidence; and upon this evidence we must be content to let the question rest.

WHEN Dante reproaches the Emperor Albert for neglect of Italy,—

"Thy sire and thou have suffer'd thus,
Through greediness of yonder realms detain'd,
The garden of the empire to run waste,"—

he adds,—

"Come, see the Capulets and Montagues,
The Filippeschi and Monaldi, man

* 'Dichterleben,' von Tieck: Berlin, 1823, p. 123, &c.

Who car'st for nought ! those sunk in grief,
and these
With dire suspicion rack'd."*

The Capulets and Montagues were amongst the fierce spirits who, according to the poet, had rendered Italy "savage and unmanageable." The Emperor Albert was murdered in 1308 : and the Veronese, who believe the story of 'Romeo and Juliet' to be historically true, fix the date of this tragedy as 1303. At that period the Scalas, or Scaligers, ruled over Verona.

If the records of history tell us little of the fair Capulet and her loved Montague, whom Shakspeare has made immortal, the novelists have seized upon the subject, as might be expected from its interest and its obscurity. Massuccio, a Neapolitan, who lived about 1470, was, it is supposed, the writer who first gave a somewhat similar story the clothing of a connected fiction. He places the scene at Sienna, and, of course, there is no mention of the Montagues and Capulets. The story, too, of Massuccio varies in its catastrophe; the bride recovering from her lethargy, produced by the same means as in the case of Juliet, and the husband being executed for a murder which had caused him to flee from his country. Mr. Douce has endeavoured to trace back the groundwork of the tale to a Greek romance by Xenophon Ephesius. Luigi da Porto, of Vicenza, gave a connected form to the legend of Romeo and Juliet, in a novel, under the title of 'La Giulietta,' which was published after his death in 1535. Luigi, in an epistle which is prefixed to this work, states that the story was told him by "an archer of mine, whose name was Peregrino, a man about fifty years old, well practised in the military art, a pleasant companion, and, like almost all his countrymen of Verona, a great talker." Bandello, in 1554, published a novel on the same subject, the ninth of his second collection. It begins, "When the Scaligers were lords of Verona," and goes on to say that these events happened "under Bartholomew Scaliger" (Bartholomeo della Scala). The various materials

to be found in these sources were embodied in a French novel by Pierre Boistean, a translation of which was published by Painter in his 'Palace of Pleasure,' in 1567; and upon this French story was founded the English poem by Arthur Brooke, published in 1562, under the title of 'The tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet, written first in Italian by Bandell, and nowe in Englishe by Ar. Br.' It appears highly probable that an English play upon the same subject had appeared previous to Brooke's poem; for a copy of that poem, which was in the possession of the Rev. H. White, of Lichfield, contains the following passage, in an address to the reader:—"Though I saw the same argument lately set forth on the stage with more commendation than I can look for, being there much better set forth than I have or can do, yet the same matter, penned as it is, may serve to like good effect, if the readers do bring with them like good minds to consider it, which hath the more encouraged me to publish it, such as it is." We thus see that Shakspeare had materials enough to work upon. But, in addition to these sources, there is a play by Lope de Vega in which the incidents are very similar; and an Italian tragedy also by Luigi Groto, which Mr. Walker, in his historical memoir of Italian tragedy, thinks that the English bard read with profit. Mr. Walker gives us passages in support of his assertion, such as a description of a nightingale when the lovers are parting, which appear to confirm this opinion.

To attempt to show, as many have attempted, what Shakspeare took from the poem of 'Romeus and Juliet,' and what from Painter's 'Palace of Pleasure'—how he was "wretchedly misled in his catastrophe," as Mr. Dunlop has it, because he had not read Luigi da Porto—and how he invented only one incident throughout the play, that of the death of Paris, and created only one character, that of Mercutio, according to the sagacious Mrs. Lenox—appears to us somewhat idle work.

The slight foundation of historical truth which can be established in the legend of 'Romeo and Juliet'—that of the "civil

* 'Purgatory,' Canto 6: Cary's Translation.

broils" of the two rival houses of Verona—would place the period of the action about the time of Dante. But this one circumstance ought not, as it appears to us, very strictly to limit this period. The legend is so obscure, that we may be justified in carrying its date forward or backward, to the extent even of a century, if anything may be gained by such a freedom. In this case, we may venture to associate the story with the period which followed the times of Petrarch and Boccaccio—verging towards the close of the fourteenth century—a period full of rich associations. Then, the literary treasures of the ancient world had been rescued out of the dust and darkness of ages,—the language of Italy had been formed, in great part, by the marvellous 'Visions' of her greatest poet; painting had been revived by Giotto and Cimabue; architecture had put on a character of beauty and majesty, and the first necessities of shelter and defence had been associated with the higher demands of comfort and taste; sculpture had displayed itself in many beautiful productions, both in marble and bronze; and music had been cultivated as a science. All these were the growth of the freedom which prevailed in the Italian republics, and of the wealth which had been acquired by commercial enterprise, under the impulses of freedom. To date the period of the action of 'Romeo and Juliet' before this revival of learning and the arts, would be to make its accessories out of harmony with the exceeding beauty of Shakspeare's drama. Even if a slight portion of historical accuracy be sacrificed, his poetry must be surrounded with an appropriate atmosphere of grace and richness.

"Of the truth of Juliet's story, they (the Veronese) seem tenacious to a degree,—insisting on the fact, giving a date (1303), and showing a tomb. It is a plain, open, and partly decayed sarcophagus, with withered leaves in it, in a wild and desolate conventual garden, once a cemetery, now ruined to the very graves. The situation struck me as very appropriate to the legend, being blighted as their love." Byron thus described the tomb of Juliet to his friend

Moore, as he saw it at the close of autumn, when withered leaves had dropped into the decayed sarcophagus, and the vines that are trailed above it had been stripped of their fruit. His letter to Moore, in which this passage occurs, is dated the 7th November*. But this wild and desolate garden only struck Byron as appropriate to the *legend*—to that simple tale of fierce hatreds and fatal loves which tradition has still preserved, amongst those who may never have read Luigi da Porto or Bandello, and who, perhaps, never heard the name of Shakspeare. To the legend only is the blighted place appropriate. For who that has ever been thoroughly imbued with the story of Juliet, as told by Shakspeare,—who that has heard his "glorious song of praise on that inexpressible feeling which ennobles the soul and gives to it its highest sublimity, and which elevates even the senses themselves into soul,"†—who that, in our great poet's matchless delineation of Juliet's love, has perceived "whatever is most intoxicating in the odour of a southern spring, languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous on the first opening of the rose,"‡—who, indeed, that looks upon the tomb of the Juliet of Shakspeare, can see only a shapeless ruin amidst wildness and desolation?

"A grave? Oh, no; a lantern, . . .
For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
This vault a feasting presence full of light."

Wordsworth has a philosophical remark upon Shakspeare which is applicable to all his tragedies:—"Shakspeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us as pathetic beyond the bounds of pleasure." Wordsworth adds, that this effect, "in a much greater degree than might at first be imagined, is to be ascribed to small, but continual and regular, impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement."§ In *Romeo and Juliet* the principle of limiting the pathetic according to the degree in which it is calculated to produce

* Moore's 'Life of Byron,' 8vo. : 1838, p. 327.

† A. W. Schlegel's 'Lectures,' Black's translation, vol. ii., p. 187.

‡ Ibid.

§ Observations prefixed to the second edition of 'Lyrical Ballads.'

emotions of pleasure is interwoven with the whole structure and conduct of the play. The tragical part of the story, from the first scene to the last, is held in subjection to the beautiful. It is not only that the beautiful comes to the relief of the tragic, as in 'Lear' and 'Othello,' but here the tragic is only a mode of exhibiting the beautiful under its most striking aspects. Shakspeare never intended that the story of 'Romeo and Juliet' should lacerate the heart. When Mrs. Inchbald, therefore, said, in her preface to the acted play, "'Romeo and Juliet' is called a pathetic tragedy, but it is not so in reality—it charms the understanding and delights the imagination, without melting, though it touches, the heart,"—she paid the highest compliment to Shakspeare's skill as an artist, for he had thoroughly worked out his own idea. "Otway," Mrs. Inchbald adds, "would have rendered it more effective." Otway *did* render it "more effective." It is quite sufficient to refer to his 'Caius Marius,' to show his success in converting beauty into what is called force. He did exactly what Garrick's less skilful hand ventured to do—to make Juliet wake before Romeo dies. It is marvellous how acute and ingenious men, such as Thomas Warton, for example, should be betrayed into criticism which deals with such a poem as 'Romeo and Juliet' as if there were no unity of feeling, no homogeneousness, in its entire construction. Warton says, "Shakspeare, misled by the English poem, missed the opportunity of introducing a most affecting scene by the natural and obvious conclusion of the story. In Luigi's novel, Juliet awakes from her trance in the tomb before the death of Romeo."* Shakspeare misled! Shakspeare missing the opportunity! Shakspeare working in the dark! Let us see what has been done by those who were not "misled," and who seized upon "the opportunity." Garrick has written sixty lines of good, orthodox, commonplace dialogue between Romeo and Juliet in the tomb, in which Romeo, before he begins to rave, talks very much in the style of one of Shenstone's shepherds,—as, for example,—

* 'History of English Poetry,' vol. iv. p. 301 (1824).

"And all my mind was happiness and thee."

Garrick, moreover, has omitted all such Shakspearean images as would be offensive to superfine ears, such as—

"Here, here will I remain

With worms that are thy chambermaids."

And yet, with all his efforts to destroy the beautiful, and all his managerial skill to thrust forward that species of pathetic which the actor delights in, for the purpose of exhibiting himself and bringing down the galleries, 'Romeo and Juliet,' according to Mrs. Inchbald, "seldom attracts an elegant audience. The company that frequent the side-boxes will not come to a tragedy, unless to weep in torrents; and 'Romeo and Juliet' will not draw even a copious shower of tears." Why, no! The vulgar pathos that Garrick has daubed over Shakspeare's catastrophe, with the same skill with which a picture-dealer would mend a Correggio, only serves to make the beauty, that he has been constrained to leave untouched, more unintelligible to "the company that frequent the side-boxes." The whole thing has become out of keeping. Instead of the sweetness that "ends with a long deep sigh, like the breeze of the evening,"† we have a rant about "cruel, cursed fate," which shrieks like the gusty wind in the chinks of a deserted and poverty-stricken hut. Instead of that beautiful close in which "the spring and the winter meet, winter assumes the character of spring, and spring the sadness of winter,"‡ we have here a fierce storm,—“such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,”—which produces the effect of mere physical terror. Instead of "the flower that is softly shed on the earth, yet putting forth undying odours,"§ we have the rank and loathsome weeds of the charnel-house. It is some praise to our age that any new attempts to "improve" Shakspeare would not be tolerated. It is a higher praise that the endeavour to revive upon the stage what the greatest master of the dramatic art really wrote has,

† Coleridge; 'Drake's Memorials.'

‡ Coleridge's 'Literary Remains.'

§ 'Retrospective Review.'

in some few instances, received adequate encouragement. But we have yet a great deal to learn, and a great deal to unlearn, before the principle upon which 'Romeo and Juliet' was written would be thoroughly appreciated by an *audience*. With the millions that *read* Shakspeare throughout the civilized world there is no difficulty.

Coleridge has described the homogeneousness—the totality of interest—which is the great characteristic of this play, by one of those beautiful analogies which could only proceed from the pen of a true poet:—

“Whence arises the harmony that strikes us in the wildest natural landscapes,—in the relative shapes of rocks, the harmony of colours in the heaths, ferns, and lichens, the leaves of the beech and the oak, the stems and rich brown branches of the birch and other mountain trees, varying from verging autumn to returning spring,—compared with the visual effect from the greater number of artificial plantations?—From this, that the natural landscape is effected, as it were, by a single energy modified *ab intra* in each component part. And, as this is the particular excellence of the Shakspearean drama generally, so is it especially characteristic of the 'Romeo and Juliet.'”*

Schlegel carried out the proofs of this assertion in an 'Essay on Romeo and Juliet';† in which, to use his own words, he “went through the whole of the scenes in their order, and demonstrated the inward necessity of each with reference to the whole; showed why such a particular circle of characters and relations was placed around the two lovers; explained the signification of the mirth here and there scattered; and justified the use of the occasional heightening given to the poetical colours.”‡ Schlegel wisely did this to exhibit what is more remarkable in Shakspeare than in any other poet, “the thorough formation of a work, even in its minutest part, according to a leading idea—the dominion of the animating spirit over all the means of execution.”§ The general

criticism of Schlegel upon 'Romeo and Juliet' is based upon a perfect comprehension of this great principle upon which Shakspeare worked. Schlegel, we apprehend, succeeded Coleridge in giving a genial tone to criticism upon Shakspeare—for Coleridge first lectured on the drama in 1802, and Schlegel in 1808; and Schlegel may also have owed something indirectly to Coleridge,—to that master-mind who filled other minds as if they were conduits from his exhaustless fountain. But he in himself is a most acute and profound critic; and what he has done to make Shakspeare properly known, even in this country, where our perception of his greatness had long been obscured amidst the deep gloom of the critical fog that had hung over us for more than a century, ought never to be forgotten. The following is the close of a celebrated passage from Schlegel, upon 'Romeo and Juliet,' which has often been quoted;—but it is altogether so true and so beautiful, that we cannot resist the pleasure of circulating it still more widely:—

“Whatever is most intoxicating in the odour of a southern spring, languishing in the song of the nightingale, or voluptuous on the first opening of the rose, is breathed into this poem. But, even more rapidly than the earliest blossoms of youth and beauty decay, it hurries on from the first timidly bold declaration of love and modest return, to the most unlimited passion, to an irrevocable union; then, amidst alternating storms of rapture and despair, to the death of the two lovers, who still appear enviable, as their love survives them, and as by their death they have obtained a triumph over every separating power. The sweetest and the bitterest, love and hatred, festivity and dark forebodings, tender embraces and sepulchres, the fulness of life and self-annihilation, are all here brought close to each other; and all these contrasts are so blended in the harmonious and wonderful work into a unity of impression, that the echo which the whole leaves behind in the mind resembles a single but endless sigh.”||

In selecting these passages to establish in the minds of our readers the great principle

* 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 150.

† 'Charakteristiken und Kritiken.'

‡ 'Lectures,' vol. ii. p. 127.

§ Ibid., p. 153.

|| 'Lectures,' vol. ii. p. 186.

of the unity of feeling which so thoroughly pervades the 'Romeo and Juliet,' and which constitutes the "particular excellence of the Shakspearean drama," we have indirectly furnished the proof of the assertion with which we set out, that the tragical part of the story, from the first scene to the last, is held in subjection to the beautiful. The structure of the play essentially required this. Coleridge has said that "Shakspeare meant the 'Romeo and Juliet' to approach to a poem;" but, of course, Coleridge meant a poem entirely modified by the dramatic power. We shall venture to trespass upon the attention of our readers, whilst we examine the conduct of the story and the development of the characters under this aspect. When we have arrived at a due conception of the principle of art on which this drama was constructed—that of sublimating all that is literal and common in human actions and human thoughts, by the force of passion and imagination, throwing their rich colours upon the chief actors, and colouring, upon an indispensable law of harmony, all the groups around them—we shall reject, as utterly unworthy, all that miscalled criticism which takes its stand upon a *material* foundation, and, dealing with high poetry as if it were a thing of demonstrations and syllogisms, tells us that Shakspeare's comic scenes are here "happily wrought, but his pathetic strains are always polluted with some unexpected depravations. His persons, however distressed, have a conceit left them in their misery, a miserable conceit."*

The first scenes of nearly every play of Shakspeare are remarkable for the skill with which they prepare the mind for all the after scenes. We do not see the succession of scenes; the catastrophe is unrevealed. But we look into a dim and distant prospect, and by what is in the foreground we can form a general notion of the landscape that will be presented to us, as the clouds roll away, and the sun lights up its wild mountains or its fertile valleys. When Sampson and Gregory enter "armed with swords and bucklers"—when we hear, "a dog of the

house of Montague moves me"—we know that these are not common servants, and live not in common times: with them the excitement of party-spirit does not rise into strong passion,—it presents its ludicrous side. They quarrel like angry curs, who snarl, yet are afraid to bite. But the "furious Tybalt" in a moment shows us that these hasty quarrels cannot have peaceful endings. The strong arm of authority suspends the affray; but the spirit of enmity is not put down. The movement of this scene is as rapid as the quarrel itself. It produces the effect upon the mind of something which startles—almost terrifies; which passes away into repose, but which leaves an ineffaceable impression upon the senses. The calm immediately succeeds. Benvolio's speech,—

"Madam, an hour before the worshipp'd sun
Peer'd forth the golden window of the east,"—

at once shows us that we are entering into the region of high poetry. Coleridge remarks that the succeeding speech of old Montague exhibits the poetical aspect of the play even more strikingly:—

"Many a morning hath he there been seen,
With tears augmenting the fresh morning's
dew."

It is remarkable that the speech thus commencing, which contains twenty lines as highly wrought as anything in Shakspeare, is not in the first copy of this play. The experience of the artist taught him where to lay on the poetical colouring brighter and brighter. How beautifully these lines prepare us for the appearance of Romeo—the now musing, abstracted Romeo—the Romeo, who, like the lover of Chaucer,

"Solitary was ever alone,
And waking all the night, making moan."

The love of Romeo was unrequited love. It was a sentiment rather than a passion—a love which displayed itself "in the numbers that Petrarch flowed in"—a love that solaced itself in antithetical conceits upon its own misery, and would draw consolation from melancholy associations. It was the love without the "true Promethean fire." But it was the fit preparation for what was to

* Johnson's concluding Remarks on 'Romeo and Juliet.'

follow. The dialogue between Capulet and Paris prepares us for Juliet—the “hopeful lady of his earth,” who

“Hath not seen the change of fourteen years.”

The old man does not think her “ripe to be a bride;” but we are immediately reminded of the precocity of nature under a southern sun, by another magical touch of poetry, which tells us of youth and freshness—of summer in “April”—of “fresh female buds” breathing the fragrance of opening flowers. Juliet at length comes. We see the submissive and gentle girl; but the garrulity of the Nurse carries us back even to the

“Prettiest babe that e’er I nursed.”

Neither Juliet nor Romeo had rightly read their own hearts. He was sighing for a shadow—she fancied that she could subject her feelings to the will of others:—

“I’ll look to like, if looking liking move:

But no more deep will I endart mine eye,

Than your consent gives strength to make it fly.”

The preparation for their first interview goes forward: Benvolio has persuaded Romeo to go to Capulet’s feast. There is a slight pause in the action, but how gracefully is it filled up! Mercutio comes upon the scene. Coleridge has described him as “that exquisite ebullience and overflow of youthful life, wafted on over the laughing waves of pleasure and prosperity, as a wanton beauty that distorts the face on which she knows her lover is gazing enraptured, and wrinkles her forehead in the triumph of its smoothness! Wit ever wakeful, fancy busy and procreative as an insect, courage, an easy mind that, without cares of its own, is at once disposed to laugh away those of others, and yet to be interested in them,—these and all other congenial qualities, melting into the common *copula* of them all, the man of rank and the gentleman, with all its excellences and all its weaknesses, constitute the character of Mercutio!”* Is this praise of Mercutio overcharged? We think not, looking at him dramatically. He is placed by the side of Romeo, to contrast with him,

but also to harmonize. The poetry of Mercutio is that of fancy:—the poetry of Romeo is that of imagination. The wit of Mercutio is the overflow of animal spirits, occasionally polluted, like a spring pure from the well-head, by the soil over which it passes:—the wit of Romeo is somewhat artificial, and scarcely self-sustained;—it is the unaccustomed play of the intellect when the passions “have come to the clenching point,”—but it is under control—it has no exuberance which, like the wit of Mercutio, admits the colouring of the sensual and the sarcastic. The courage of Mercutio is, in the same way, the courage of high animal spirits, fearless of consequences, and laughing even when it has paid the penalty of its rashness—“Ask for me to-morrow, and you shall find me a grave man.” The courage of Romeo is reflective and forbearing,—

“I do protest, I never injured thee.”

But, when his friend has fallen, his “newly entertained revenge” casts off all control:—

“Away to heaven, respective lenity!”

Then, again, how finely the calm, benevolent good sense of Benvolio blends with these opposites!

But the masquerade waits. We have here the realization of youth and freshness which Capulet promised to Paris; but at the moment when we see “the guests and the maskers” we have a touch, in the expression of the old man’s natural feelings, which tells us how perishable these things are:—

“I have seen the day,

That I have worn a visor; and could tell

A whispering tale in a fair lady’s ear,

Such as would please;—’t is gone, ’t is gone,
’t is gone!”

But Juliet appears, and we think not of decay. We forget that “one generation pushes another off the stage.” The very first words of Romeo show the change that has come o’er him. He went into that “hall in Capulet’s house,” fearing

“Some consequence yet hanging in the stars.”

He had “a soul of lead”—he would be “a candle-holder and look on.” But he has

* ‘Literary Remains,’ vol. ii.

seen Juliet : and with what gorgeous images has that sight filled his imagination !

"Oh, she doth teach the torches to burn bright !
Her beauty hangs upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear."

We have now the poetry of passion bursting upon us with its purple light. Compare this with the pale poetry of sentiment in the first scene, when he talks of Rosaline being

"too fair, too wise, wisely too fair."

Perfectly in accordance with this exaltation of mind is the address of Romeo to Juliet. The dialogue must be considered as that of persons each acting a character. But there is more in it than meets the ear ;—it is not entirely the half expression of the thoughts of two maskers :—there is an under-current of reality which blends the language of affection with the language of compliment. When Romeo asks of the Nurse, "What is her mother?" and when Juliet inquires,

"What's he that now is going out of door?"

we see "the beginning of the end." But we do not forget that the anger of Tybalt at Romeo's presence has thrown a shadow over the brightness of their young love. The maskers are gone—the torches are extinguished—the voice of the revelry has ceased.

Romeo has leapt the wall of Capulet's garden. There are no longer

"Earth-treading stars that make dark heaven
light."

He has found a sequestered spot far apart from that banqueting-hall from which his Juliet descended, amidst the gay groups that floated about in that garden, to hang

"upon the cheek of night
As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear."

He is alone. The moon

"Tips with silver all those fruit-tree tops."

He hears in the distant street the light-hearted Mercutio calling upon him by the names of

"Humours! madman! passion! lover!"

But he heeds him not. Juliet appears. She speaks.

"Oh, speak again, bright angel ! for thou art
As glorious to this night, being o'er my head,
As is a winged messenger of heaven
Unto the white-upturned wond'ring eyes
Of mortals, that fall back to gaze on him,
When he bestrides the lazy-pacing clouds,
And sails upon the bosom of the air."

From this poetical elevation it would seem almost impossible for the lover to descend to earth,—and yet the earth hath visions of tenderness and purity, which equally belong to the highest regions of poetry. The fears of Juliet for his safety ;—the "farewell compliment ;"—the

"In truth, fair Montague, I am too fond ;"—
the "do not swear ;"—the

"Stay but a little, I will come again ;"—
the

"If that thy bent of love be honourable :"—

all these indications of the union of "purity of heart and the glow of imagination" belong to the highest region of an ideal world, and yet are linked to this our own world of beauty and frailty. This is one of the great scenes of the poem which cannot be comprehended if disjoined from all that is about it ; any more than Juliet's soliloquy, in the third act, after her marriage. It is one of the scenes that is consequently obnoxious to a false ridicule, and, what is worse, to a groveling criticism. In the midst of the intensity of Juliet's "timidly bold declaration of love," Steevens inserts one of the atrocious notes that he perpetrated under the fictitious name of Amner. It is a warning to us how far a prosaic spirit may descend into dirt, when it attempts to deal with a great artist without reverence for his art. There are three modes in which criticism, or what is called criticism, may be applied to high art. The first is, where the critic endeavours to look at an entire work,—not at parts of a work only,—in some degree through the same medium as the poet looked at his unformed creations. The second is, where the critic rejects that medium, for the most part through incapacity of using it, and peers through the smoked glass of what he calls common sense, that his eyes, forsooth, may not be dazzled.

The third is, where the critic, from a superabundance of the power of detecting what appears the ridiculous side of things (which results from a deficiency of imagination), takes a caricaturist's view of the highest exercises of the intellect, and asserts his own cleverness by presenting a *travestie*. The first system, though it may be the most difficult, is the most safe; the third, though it appears the most insidious, is the least injurious; the second is, at once, easy and debasing; it may begin in Steevens and end in Amner.

The "silver-sweet" sound of "lovers' tongues by night" is hushed. "The grey-eyed morn" sees the Friar in his cell, bearing his "osier-cage" of

"Baleful weeds, and precious juiced flowers."

Here is a new link in the conduct of the story. And what a beautiful transition have we made from the elevated poetry of passion to the scarcely less elevated poetry of philosophy! The old man, whose pious thoughts shape themselves into sweet and solemn cadences, stands as the antagonist principle of the passionate conflicts that are going on around him. He is to be a great agent in the workings of the drama. He would close up the dissensions of the rival houses—he would make the new lovers blessed in their union—he would assuage the misery of Romeo's exile—he would save his lady from an unholy marriage—he would join them again in life, although the tomb appears to have separated them. The good old man will rely too much upon his philosophy, and his skilful dealing with human actions; as the lovers have already relied too much upon the integrity of their passion as a shield against calamity. The half-surprise, the half-gladness of the Friar, when Romeo tells him where his "heart's dear love is set," are delightful. The reproof that is meant for a commendation—the "come, young waverer"—the "wisely and slow,"—are all true to nature. But Romeo has secured his purpose, and his heart is at ease. Then is he fit to play a part in the comic scenes that succeed,—to bandy words with Mercutio—to be pleasant with the Nurse. But Juliet's

soliloquy while she is waiting for the Nurse,—

"Oh, she is lame! love's heralds should be thoughts,"—

and the scene with Romeo, Juliet, and the Friar, again bring us back to the high region of poetry. The latter scene was greatly elaborated after the first draft.

We have almost lost sight of the quarrels of the rival houses of Verona.—We see only the two lovers, who cannot sum up "half their sum of wealth," and have forgotten their names of Montague and Capulet as names of strife. But an evil hour is approaching. The brawl with which the drama opened is to be renewed—

"The day is hot, the Capulets abroad."

The "fiery Tybalt" and the "bold Mercutio" are the first victims of this factious hate—and Romeo is banished. The action does not move laggingly—all is heat and precipitation. Juliet sits alone in her bower, unconscious of all but her impassioned imaginings. She thinks aloud in the solitude which is around her, with a characteristic vehemence of temperament; but in this soliloquy "there is something so almost infantine in her perfect simplicity, so playful and fantastic in the imagery and language, that the charm of sentiment and innocence is thrown over the whole."* The scene in which the Nurse tells her disjointed story of Tybalt's death is a masterpiece. We have here to encounter the often-repeated objection, that Shakspeare uses conceits when he ought to be expressing the language of vehement passion. The conceits are not in accordance with the general taste of our own age, though they were so with that of Shakspeare's. But they have a much higher justification. They are the results of strong emotion, seeking to relieve itself by a violent effort of the intellect, that the will may recover its balance. Immediately after the lines in which we have that play upon words whose climax is—

"I am not I, if there be such an I,"

* Mrs. Jameson's 'Characteristics of Women,' third edition, vol. i. p. 193.

we come at once to an exclamation of the deepest pathos and simplicity:—

“Oh, break my heart!—poor bankrout;”—

and then, when Juliet knows that Romeo is not dead, but that Tybalt has fallen by the hand of her husband, what a natural revulsion of feeling succeeds!—

“Oh, that deceit should dwell
In such a gorgeous palace!”

The transition from her reproach of Tybalt's murderer, to a glorious trust in the integrity of her lord, is surpassingly beautiful. Not less beautiful is the passion which Romeo exhibits in the Friar's cell. Each of the lovers in these scenes shows the intensity of their abandonment to an overmastering will. “They see only themselves in the universe.” That is the true moral of their fate. But, even under the direst calamity, they catch at the one joy which is left—the short meeting before the parting. And what a parting that is! Here, again, comes the triumph of the beautiful over the merely tragic. They are once more calm. Their love again breathes of all the sweet sights and sounds in a world of beauty. They are parting—but the almost happy Juliet says—

“It is not yet near day:—
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.”

Romeo, who sees the danger of delay, is not deceived:—

“It was the lark, the herald of the morn.”

Then what a burst of poetry follows!—

“Night's candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountains' tops.”

The scene closes with that exquisite display of womanly tenderness in Juliet, which hurries from the forgetfulness of joy in her husband's presence to apprehension for his safety. After this scene we are almost content to think, as Romeo fancied he thought,

“come what sorrow can,
It cannot countervail the exchange of joy.”

The sorrow does come upon poor Juliet with redoubled force. The absolute father, the unyielding mother, the treacherous Nurse,—all hurrying her into a loathed marriage,—might drive one less resolved to

the verge of madness. But from this moment her love has become heroism. She sees

“No pity sitting in the clouds”—

she rejects her Nurse—she resolves to deceive her parents. This scene brings out her character in its strongest and most beautiful relief. The Nurse, in the grossness of her nature, has dared to talk to the wife of Romeo—the all-loving and devoted wife—of the green eye of Paris! The Nurse mistook the one passion of Juliet—the sense raised into soul—for a grovelling quality that her lofty imagination would utterly despise. “O most wicked fiend!” Not so Juliet's other counsellor. The Friar estimated her constancy, and he did “spy a kind of hope” that it might be rewarded. He saw that Juliet would, at all hazards, put away “the shame” of marrying Paris. Well had the Friar reckoned upon her “strength of will.” The scene in his cell, and the subsequent scene when she swallows the draught, are amongst the most powerful in the play; and yet we never lose sight of the highest poetry, mingling what is grand with what is beautiful. When Juliet is supposed to be dead, nature again asserts her empire over the tetchy and absolute father, and the mother weeps over the

“One, poor one, one poor and loving child.”

Here, again, the gentle poetry of common feelings comes to the relief of the scene; and the Friar brings in a higher poetry in the consolations of divine truth.

As we approach the catastrophe, the poetical cast of Romeo's mind becomes even more clearly defined than in the earlier scenes. It was first fanciful, then imaginative, then impassioned—but when deep sorrow has been added to his love, and he treads upon the threshold of the world of shadows, it puts on even a higher character of beauty. As to the celebrated speech of the ‘Apothecary,’ we refuse to believe that it forms an exception to the general character of the beauty that throws its rich evening light over the closing scenes.

The criticism of the French school has not spared this famous passage. Joseph Warton, an elegant scholar, but who belonged to this

school, has the following observations in his 'Virgil' (1763, vol. i. p. 301):—

"It may not be improper to produce the following glaring instance of the absurdity of introducing long and minute descriptions into tragedy. When Romeo receives the dreadful and unexpected news of Juliet's death, this fond husband, in an agony of grief, immediately resolves to poison himself. But his sorrow is interrupted, while he gives us an exact picture of the apothecary's shop from whom he intended to purchase the poison:—

'I do remember an apothecary,' &c.

I appeal to those who know anything of the human heart, whether Romeo, in this distressful situation, could have leisure to think of the alligator, empty boxes, and bladders, and other furniture, of this beggarly shop, and to point them out so distinctly to the audience. The description is, indeed, very lively and natural, but very improperly put into the mouth of a person agitated with such passion as Romeo is represented to be."

The criticism of Warton, ingenious as it may appear, and true as applied to many "long and minute descriptions in tragedy," is here based upon a wrong principle. He says that Romeo, in his distressful situation, had not "leisure" to think of the furniture of the apothecary's shop. What then had he leisure to do? Had he leisure to run off into declamations against fate, and into tedious apostrophes and generalizations, as a less skilful artist than Shakspeare would have made him indulge in? From the moment he had said,

"Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night.

Let's see for means,"

the apothecary's shop became to him the object of the most intense interest. Great passions, when they have shaped themselves into firm resolves, attach the most distinct importance to the minutest objects connected with the execution of their purpose. He had seen the apothecary's shop in his placid moments as an object of common curiosity. He had hastily looked at the tortoise and the alligator, the empty boxes, and the

earthen pots; and he had looked at the tattered weeds and overwhelming brows of their needy owner. But he had also said, when he first saw these things,

"An if a man did need a poison now,
Whose sale is present death in Mantua,
Here lives a caitiff wretch would sell it him."

When he *did* need a poison, all these documents of the misery that was to serve him came with a double intensity upon his vision. The shaping of these things into words was not for the audience. It was not to produce "a long and minute description in tragedy" that had no foundation in the workings of nature. It was the very cunning of nature which produced this description. Mischief was, indeed, swift to enter into the thoughts of the desperate man; but, the mind once made up, it took a perverse pleasure in going over every item of the circumstances that had suggested the means of mischief. All other thoughts had passed out of Romeo's mind. He had nothing left but to die; and everything connected with the means of his death was seized upon by his imagination with an energy that could only find relief in words.

Shakspeare has exhibited the same knowledge of nature in his sad and solemn poem of 'The Rape of Lucrece,' where the injured wife, having resolved to wipe out her stain by death,

"calls to mind where hangs a piece
Of skilful painting, made for Priam's Troy."

She sees in that painting some fancied resemblance to her own position, and spends the heavy hours till her husband arrives in its contemplation.

"So Lucrece set a-work sad tales doth tell
To pencill'd pensiveness and colour'd sorrow;
She lends them words, and she their looks
doth borrow."

It was the intense interest in his own resolve which made Romeo so minutely describe his apothecary. But, that stage past, came the *abstraction* of his sorrow:—

"What said my man, when my betossed soul
Did not attend him as we rode? I think
He told me Paris should have married Juliet."

Juliet was dead; and what mattered it to his "betossed soul" whom she should have married?

"Well, Juliet, I will lie with thee to-night," was the sole thought that made him remember an "apothecary," and treat what his servant said as a "dream."

The gentleness of Romeo is apparent, even while he says—

"The time and my intents are savage-wild;" for he adds, with a strong effort, to his faithful Balthasar,

"Live, and be prosperous; and farewell, good fellow."

His entreaties to Paris—"Oh, be gone!"—are full of the same tenderness. He is constrained to fight with him—he slays him—but he almost weeps over him, as

"One writ with me in sour misfortune's book." The remainder of Romeo's speech in the tomb is, as Coleridge has put it, "the master example, how beauty can at once increase and modify passion."

"Oh, here
Will I set up my everlasting rest;
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh."

This is the one portion of the "melancholy

elegy on the frailty of love, from its own nature and external circumstances,"* which Romeo sings before his last sleep. And how beautifully is the corresponding part sung by the waking and dying Juliet!—

"What's here? a cup, closed in my true love's hand?"

Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:—
O churl! drink all; and left no friendly drop,
To help me after?—I will kiss thy lips;
Haply, some poison yet doth hang on them,
To make me die with a restorative."

They have paid the penalty of the fierce hatreds that were engendered around them, and of their own precipitancy. But their misfortunes and their loves have healed the enmities of which they were the victims. "Poor sacrifices!" Capulet may now say,

"Oh, brother Montague, give me thy hand."

They have left a peace behind them which they could not taste themselves. But their first "rash and unadvised" contract was elevated into all that was pure and beautiful, by their after sorrows and their constancy; and in happier regions their affections may put on that calmness of immortality which the ancients typified in their allegory of 'Love and the Soul.'

* A. W. Schlegel.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

'THE MERCHANT OF VENICE,' like 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream,' was first printed in 1600; and it had a further similarity to that play from the circumstance of two editions appearing in the same year—the one bearing the name of a publisher, Thomas Heyes, the other that of a printer, J. Roberts. The play was not reprinted till it appeared in the folio of 1623. In that edition there are only a few variations from the quartos.

'The Merchant of Venice' is one of the

plays of Shakspeare mentioned by Francis Meres in 1598, and it is the last mentioned in his list. From the original entry at Stationers' Hall, in 1598, providing that it be not printed without licence first had of the Lord Chamberlain, it may be assumed that it had not then been acted by the Lord Chamberlain's servants. We know, however, so little about the formalities of licence that we cannot regard this point as certain.

Stephen Gosson, who, in 1579, was moved

to publish a tract called 'The School of Abuse, containing a pleasant invective against poets, pipers, players, jesters, and such like caterpillars of the commonwealth,' thus describes a play of his time:—"The Jew, shown at the Bull, representing the greediness of worldly choosers, and the bloody minds of usurers." Mr. Skottowe somewhat leaps to a conclusion that this play contains the same plot as 'The Merchant of Venice':—"The loss of this performance is justly a subject of regret, for, as it combined within its plot the two incidents of the bond and the caskets, it would, in all probability, have thrown much additional light on Shakspeare's progress in the composition of his highly finished comedy."* As all we know of this play is told us by Gosson, it is rather bold to assume that it combined the two incidents of the bond and the caskets. The combination of these incidents is perhaps one of the most remarkable examples of Shakspeare's dramatic skill. "In the management of the plot," says Mr. Hallam, "which is sufficiently complex without the slightest confusion or incoherence, I do not conceive that it has been surpassed in the annals of any theatre." The rude dramatists of 1579 were not remarkable for the combination of incidents. It was probably reserved for the skill of Shakspeare to bring the caskets and the bond in juxtaposition. He found the incidents far apart, but it was for him to fuse them together. We cannot absolutely deny Mr. Douce's conjecture that the play mentioned by Gosson *might* have furnished our poet with the whole of the plot; but it is certainly an abuse of language to say that it *did* furnish him, because the Jew shown at the Bull deals with "worldly choosers," and the "bloody minds of usurers." We admit that the coincidence is curious.

Warton first drew attention to a ballad which he considers was written before 'The Merchant of Venice,' 'A new Song, shewing the cruelty of Gernutus, a Jew, who, lending to a merchant an hundred crowns, would have a pound of his flesh because he could not pay him at the time appointed.'

* 'Life of Shakspeare,' vol. i. p. 330.

This curious production is printed in Percy's 'Reliques.'

Warton's opinion of the priority of this ballad to 'The Merchant of Venice' is thus expressed:—"It may be objected that this ballad might have been written after, and copied from, Shakespeare's play. But, if that had been the case, it is most likely that the author would have preserved Shakespeare's name of Shylock for the Jew; and nothing is more likely than that Shakespeare, in copying from this ballad, should alter the name from Gernutus to one more Jewish . . . Our ballad has the air of a narrative written before Shakespeare's play; I mean, that, if it had been written after the play, it would have been much more full and circumstantial. At present, it has too much the nakedness of an original."* The reasoning of Warton is scarcely borne out by a new fact, for which we are indebted to the researches of Mr. Collier. Thomas Jordan, in 1664, printed a ballad, or romance, called 'The Forfeiture;' and Mr. Collier says—"So much does Shakespeare's production seem to have been forgotten in 1664, that Thomas Jordan made a ballad of it, and printed it as an original story (at least without any acknowledgment), in his '*Royal Arbor of Loyal Poesie*,' in that year. In the same scarce little volume he also uses the plot of the serious part of 'Much Ado about Nothing,' and of 'The Winter's Tale,' both of which had been similarly laid by for a series of years, partly, perhaps, on account of the silencing of the theatres from and after 1642. The circumstance has hitherto escaped observation; and Jordan felt authorized to take such liberties with the story of 'The Merchant of Venice,' that he has represented the Jew's daughter, instead of Portia, as assuming the office of assessor to the Duke of Venice in the trial-scene, for the sake of saving the life of the Merchant, with whom she was in love."† Now, it is remarkable that this ballad by Jordan, which was unquestionably written *after* the play, is much *less* full and circumstantial than the old ballad of 'Gernutus;' so that Warton's

* 'Observations on the Fairy Queen,' 1807, vol. i. p. 182.

† 'New Particulars regarding the Works of Shakespeare,' p. 36.

argument, as a general principle, will not hold. It appears to us that 'Gernutus' is, in reality, *very* full and circumstantial; and that some of the circumstances are identical with those of the play. Compare, for example,—

"Go with me to a notary, seal me there
Your single bond; and in a merry sport," &c.

with

"But we will have a merry jest,
For to be talked long;
You shall make me a bond, quoth he,
That shall be large and strong."

And, again, compare

"Why dost thou *whet* thy knife so earnestly?"

with

"The bloudie Jew now ready is
With *whetted* blade in hand."

But the ballad of 'Gernutus' wants that remarkable feature of the play, the intervention of Portia to save the life of the Merchant; and this, to our minds, is the strongest confirmation that the ballad *preceded* the comedy. Shakspeare found that incident in the source from which the ballad-writer professed to derive his history:—

"In Venice towne not long agoe,
A cruel Jew did dwell,
Which lived all on usurie,
As *Italian writers* tell."

It was from an Italian writer, Ser Giovanni, the author of a collection of tales, called '*Il Pecorone*,' written in the fourteenth century, and first published at Milan in 1558, that Shakspeare unquestionably derived some of the incidents of his story, although he might be familiar with another version of the same tale. An abstract of this chapter of the '*Pecorone*' may be found in Mr. Dunlop's '*History of Fiction*;' and a much fuller epitome of a scarce translation of the tale, printed in 1755, was first given in Johnson's edition of Shakspeare, and is reprinted in all the variorum editions. In this story we have a rich lady at Belmont, who is to be won upon certain conditions; and she is finally the prize of a young merchant, whose friend, having become surety for him to a Jew, under the same penalty as in the play,

is rescued from the forfeiture by the adroitness of the married lady, who is disguised as a lawyer. The pretended judge receives, as in the comedy, her marriage ring as a gratuity, and afterwards banters her husband, in the same way, upon the loss of it.

Some of the stories of '*Il Pecorone*,' as indeed of Boccaccio, and other early Italian writers, appear to have been the common property of Europe, derived from some Oriental origin. Mr. Douce has given an extremely curious extract from the English '*Gesta Romanorum*,'—"a Manuscript, preserved in the Harleian Collection, No. 7333, written in the reign of Henry the Sixth," in which the daughter of "Selestinus, a wise emperor in Rome," exacts somewhat similar conditions, from a knight who loved her, as the lady in the '*Pecorone*.' Being reduced to poverty by a compliance with these conditions, he applies to a merchant to lend him money; and the loan is granted under the following covenant:—"And the covenannt shalle be this, that thou make to me a charter of thine owne blood, in condicion that yf thowe kepe not thi day of payment, hit shalle be lefulle to me for to draw away alle the flesh of thi body froo the bone with a sharp swerde, and, yf thou wolt assent hereto, I shalle fulfille thi wille." In this ancient story the borrower of the money makes himself subject to the penalty without the intervention of a friend; and, having forgotten the day of payment, is authorised by his wife to give any sum which is demanded. The money is refused by the merchant, and the charter of blood exacted. Judgment is given against the knight; but, "the damysell, his love, whenne she harde telle that the lawe passid agenst him, she kytte of al the longe her of hir hede, and claddie hir in precious clothing like to a man, and yede to the palyis." The scene that ensues in the '*Gesta Romanorum*' has certainly more resemblance to the conduct of the incident in Shakspeare than the similar one in the '*Pecorone*.' Having given a specimen of the *language* of the manuscript of Henry the Sixth's time, which Mr. Douce thinks was of the same period as the writing, we shall continue the story in orthography which will present fewer difficulties to many

of our readers, and which will allow them to feel the beautiful simplicity of this ancient romance. We have no doubt that Shakspeare was familiar with this part of '*Gesta Romanorum*,' as well as with that portion from which he derived the story of the caskets, to which we shall presently advert:—"Now, in all this time, the damsel his love had sent knights for to espy and inquire how the law was pursued against him. And, when she heard tell that the law passed against him, she cut off all the long hair of her head, and clad her in precious clothing like to a man, and went to the palace where her leman was to be judged, and saluted the justice, and all trowed that she had been a knight. And the judge inquired of what country she was, and what she had to do there. She said, I am a knight, and come of far country; and hear tidings that there is a knight among you that should be judged to death, for an obligation that he made to a merchant, and therefore I am come to deliver him. Then the judge said, It is law of the emperor, that whosoever bindeth him with his own proper will and consent without any constraining, he shall be served so again. When the damsel heard this, she turned to the merchant, and said, Dear friend, what profit is it to thee that this knight, that standeth here, ready to the doom, be slain? It were better to thee to have money than to have him slain. Thou speakest all in vain, quoth the merchant; for, without doubt, I will have the law, since he bound himself so freely; and therefore he shall have none other grace than law will, for he came to me, and I not to him. I desire him not thereto against his will. Then, said she, I pray thee how much shall I give to have my petition? I shall give thee thy money double; and, if that be not pleasing to thee, ask of me what thou wilt, and thou shalt have. Then said he, Thou heardest me never say but that I would have my covenant kept. Truly, said she; and I say before you, Sir Judge, and before you all, thou shalt believe me with a right knowledge of that I shall say to you. Ye have heard how much I have proffered this merchant for the life of this knight, and he forsaketh all and asketh for more, and that

liketh me much. And, therefore, lordings that be here, hear me what I shall say. Ye know well that the knight bound him by letter that the merchant should have power to cut his flesh from the bones, but there was no covenant made of shedding of blood. Thereof was nothing spoken; and, therefore, let him set hand on him anon; and if he shed any blood with his shaving of the flesh, forsooth, then shall the king have good law upon him. And when the merchant heard this, he said, Give me my money, and I forgive my action. Forsooth, quoth she, thou shalt not have one penny, for before all this company I proffered to thee all that I might, and thou forsook it, and saidst loudly, I shall have my covenant; and therefore do thy best with him, but look that thou shed no blood, I charge thee, for it is not thine, and no covenant was thereof. Then the merchant, seeing this, went away confounded; and so was the knight's life saved, and no penny paid."

In '*The Orator*,' translated from the French of Alexander Silvayn, printed in 1596, the arguments urged by a Jew and a Christian under similar circumstances are set forth at great length. It has been generally asserted that Shakspeare borrowed from this source; but the similarity appears to us exceedingly small. The arguments, or declamations, as they are called, are given at length in the variorum editions.

"It is well known," says Mrs. Jameson, "that '*The Merchant of Venice*' is founded on two different tales; and, in weaving together his double plot in so masterly a manner, Shakspeare has rejected altogether the character of the astutious lady of Belmont, with her magic potions, who figures in the Italian novel. With yet more refinement, he has thrown out all the licentious part of the story, which some of his contemporary dramatists would have seized on with avidity, and made the best or the worst of it possible; and he has substituted the trial of the caskets from another source."* That source is the '*Gesta Romanorum*.' In Mr. Douce's elaborate treatise upon this most singular collection of ancient stories, we have the following analysis

* '*Characteristics of Women*,' vol. i. p. 72.

of the ninety-ninth chapter of the English '*Gesta*;' which, Mr. Douce says, "is obviously the story which supplied the caskets of '*The Merchant of Venice*.'" "A marriage was proposed between the son of Anselmus, emperor of Rome, and the daughter of the king of Apulia. The young lady in her voyage was shipwrecked and swallowed by a whale. In this situation she contrived to make a fire and to wound the animal with a knife, so that he was driven towards the shore, and slain of an earl named Pirius, who delivered the princess and took her under his protection. On relating her story, she was conveyed to the emperor. In order to prove whether she was worthy to receive the hand of his son, he placed before her three vessels. The first was of gold, and filled with dead men's bones; on it was this inscription—'*Who chooses me shall find what he deserves.*' The second was of silver, filled with earth, and thus inscribed—'*Who chooses me shall find what nature covets.*' The third vessel was of lead, but filled with precious stones; it had this inscription—'*Who chooses me shall find what God hath placed.*' The emperor then commanded her to choose one of the vessels, informing her that, if she made choice of that which should profit herself and others, she would obtain his son; if of what should profit neither herself nor others, she would lose him. The princess, after praying to God for assistance, preferred the leaden vessel. The emperor informed her that she had chosen as he wished, and immediately united her with his son."

In dealing with the truly dramatic subject of the forfeiture of the bond, Shakspeare had to choose between one of two courses that lay open before him. The '*Gesta Romanorum*' did not surround the debtor and the creditor with any prejudices. We hear nothing of one being a Jew, the other a Christian. There is a remarkable story told by Gregorio Leti, in his '*Life of Pope Sixtus the Fifth*,' in which the debtor and creditor of '*The Merchant of Venice*' change places. The debtor is the Jew,—the revengeful creditor the Christian; and this incident is said to have happened at Rome in the time of Sir Francis Drake. This, no doubt, was a pure

fiction of Leti, whose narratives are by no means to be received as authorities; but it shows that he felt the intolerance of the old story, and endeavoured to correct it, though in a very inartificial manner. Shakspeare took the story as he found it in those narratives which represented the popular prejudice. If he had not before him the ballad of '*Gernutus*' (upon which point it is difficult to decide), he had certainly access to the tale of the '*Pecorone*.' If he had made the contest connected with the story of the bond between two of the same faith, he would have lost the most powerful hold which the subject possessed upon the feelings of an audience two centuries and a half ago. If he had gone directly counter to those feelings (supposing that the story which Leti tells had been known to him, as some have supposed), his comedy would have been hooted from the stage. The ballad of '*Gernutus*' has the following amongst its concluding stanzas:—

"Good people, that do hear this song,
For truth I dare well say,
That many a wretch as ill as he
Doth live now at this day;

That seeketh nothing but the spoil
Of many a wealthy man,
And for to trap the innocent
Deviseth what they can."

It is probable that, although the Jews had been under an edict of banishment from England from the time of Edward I., they had crept into the country after the Reformation. Lord Bacon says that the objectors against usury maintained "That usurers should have orange-tawny bonnets, because they do judaize." The orange-tawny bonnet was the descendant of the *badge of yellow felt*, of the length of six inches, and of the breadth of three inches, to be worn by each Jew after he shall be seven years old, upon his outer garment. (*Stat. de Jeuerie*.) The persecuted race settled again openly in England after the Restoration; and the pious wish, with which Thomas Jordan's ballad concludes, has evidently reference to this circumstance:—

"I wish such Jews may never come
To England, nor to London."

The 'Prioress's Tale' of Chaucer belonged to the period when the Jews were robbed, maimed, banished, and most foully vilified, with the universal consent of the powerful and the lowly, the learned and the ignorant:—

"There was in Asie, in a gret citee,
Amonges Cristen folk a Jewerie,
Sustened by a lord of that contree,
For foul usure, and lucre of vilanie,
Hateful to Crist, and to his compaignie."

It was scarcely to be avoided in those times that even Chaucer, the most genuine and natural of poets, should lend his great powers to the support of the popular belief that Jews ought to be proscribed as—

"Hateful to Crist, and to his compaignie."

But we ought to expect better things when we reach the times in which the principles of religious liberty were at least germinated. And yet what a play is Marlowe's 'Jew of Malta,'—undoubtedly one of the most popular plays even of Shakspeare's day, judging as we may from the number of performances recorded in Henslowe's papers! That drama, as compared with 'The Merchant of Venice,' has been described by Charles Lamb, with his usual felicity:—"Marlowe's Jew does not approach so near to Shakspeare's as his Edward II. Shylock, in the midst of his savage purpose, is a man. His motives, feelings, resentments, have something human in them. 'If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?' Barabas is a mere monster, brought in with a large painted nose, to please the rabble. He kills in sport—poisons whole nunneries—invents infernal machines. He is just such an exhibition as a century or two earlier might have been played before the Londoners, *by the Royal command*, when a general pillage and massacre of the Hebrews had been previously resolved on in the cabinet." 'The Jew of Malta' was written essentially upon an intolerant principle. 'The Merchant of Venice,' whilst it seized upon the prejudices of the multitude, and dealt with them as a foregone conclusion by which the whole dramatic action was to be governed, had the intention of making those

prejudices as hateful as the reaction of cruelty and revenge of which they are the cause.

Mrs. Inchbald, in her edition of the 'Acted Drama,' thus describes Lord Lansdown's *arrangement, with variations*, of 'The Merchant of Venice':—"The Jew of Venice, by Lord Lansdown, is an alteration of this play, and was acted in 1701. The noble author made some *emendations* in the work; but, having made *the Jew a comic character*, as such he caused *more laughter than detestation*, which wholly *destroyed the moral* designed by the original author." A comic Shylock is certainly the masterpiece of the improvements upon Shakspeare. We have reached a period when it is scarcely necessary to discuss whether this *emendation* of Shakspeare were right or wrong; nor, indeed, whether Mrs. Inchbald herself be perfectly correct in assuming that, if the trial scene were now brought upon the stage for the first time, "the company in the side-boxes would faint or withdraw." 'The Merchant of Venice' of the stage is, in many respects, the play of Shakspeare. Macklin put down Lord Lansdown. But, up to a very recent period, it has been, with green-room propriety, accommodated to the taste of "the company in the side-boxes" by the omission of a great deal of what is highest in its poetry, and by the substitution, in some cases, of the actor's verses for Shakspeare's. It is one of the best proofs that Shakspeare is now appreciated (because he is understood), that what were considered as authority, "the prompt-books" of the theatres, such as they existed some ten years ago, have passed into utter contempt.

Turning from such matters, we come to an opinion in which Mrs. Inchbald is by no means singular—that *detestation* of the Jew is "*the moral designed by the original author.*" It is probable that, even in Shakspeare's time, this was the popular notion. In an anonymous MS. 'Elegy on Burbage,' "one of the characters he is represented to have filled is that of Shylock, who is called 'the red-hair'd Jew.' This establishes that the part was dressed in an artificial red beard and wig, in order to render it more odious and objectionable to the audience."* This circumstance

* Collier's 'New Particulars,' &c.

however, is by no means a proof to us that Shakspeare intended the Jew to move the audience to unmitigated odium. The players might have thought, indeed, that he was not odious enough for the popular appetite, and in consequence made him "more odious and objectionable." The question may be better understood as we proceed in an analysis of the characters and incidents of this drama.

A contemporary German critic, Dr. Ulrici*, has presented to us the entire plot of 'The Merchant of Venice' under a very original aspect. His object has been to discover, what he maintains had not been previously discovered, the fundamental idea of the drama—the link which holds together all its apparently heterogeneous parts. The critic first passes the several characters in review. Antonio is the noble and great-hearted, yielding to a passive melancholy, produced by the weight of a too agitating life of action; Bassanio, somewhat inconsiderate, but generous and sensible, is the genuine Italian gentleman, in the best sense of the word; Portia is most amiable, and intellectually rich (*geistreich*); Jessica is a child of nature, lost in an oriental love enthusiasm. The critic presents these characteristics in a very few words; but his portrait of Shylock is more elaborate. He is the well-struck image of the Jewish character in general—of the fallen member of a race dispersed over the whole earth, and enduring long centuries of persecution. Their firmness had become obstinacy; their quickness of intellect, craft; their love of possessions, a revolting avarice. "Nothing," says Dr. Ulrici, "had kept its rank in their universal decay, but the unconquerable constancy, the dry mummy-like tenacity of the Jewish nature. So appears Shylock—a pitiable ruin of a great and significant by-past time—the glimmering ash-spark of a faded splendour which can no longer warm or preserve, but can yet burn or destroy. We are as little able to deny him our compassion, as we can withhold our disgust against his modes of thinking and acting."

Dr. Ulrici next proceeds to notice Shak-

spere's mastership in the composition, uniting, and unfolding of the intricate plot. "We have three curious, and in themselves very complicated, knots wound into each other:—first, the process between Antonio and Shylock; next, the marriages of Bassanio and Portia, of Gratiano and Nerissa; and, lastly, the elopement of Jessica, and her love's history with Lorenzo. These various interests, actions, and adventures are disposed with such a clearness and fixedness—one so develops itself out of and with the others,—that we never lose the thread that everywhere reveals an animated and harmoniously framed principle." The critic then proceeds to say, that, although an *external* union of the chief elements is clearly enough supported, the whole seems in truth to be inevitably falling asunder; and that "we have now to inquire where lies the *internal* spiritual unity which will justify the combination of such heterogeneous elements in one drama."

Throughout many of Shakspeare's plays, according to Dr. Ulrici, the leading fundamental idea, concentrated in itself, is so intentionally hidden—the *single* makes itself so decidedly important, and comes before us so free, and self-sustained, and complete,—that the entire work is occasionally exposed to the ungrounded reproach of looseness of plan and want of coherency. On the other hand, there are sufficient intimations of the meaning of the whole scattered throughout; so that whoever has in some degree penetrated into the depths of the Shakspearean art cannot well go wrong. The sense and significance of the process between Antonio and the Jew rest clearly upon the old juridical precept, *Summum jus, summa injuria*. Shylock has, clearly, all that is material, except justice, on his side; but, while he seizes and follows his right to the letter, he falls through it into the deepest and most criminal injustice; and the same injustice, through the internal necessity which belongs to the nature of sin, falls back destructively on his own head. The same aspect in which this principle is presented to us in its extremest harshness, in the case of Shylock, shows itself in various outbursts of light and shadow throughout

* 'Ueber Shakspeare's dramatische Kunst, und sein Verhältniss zu Calderon und Göthe.'

all the remaining elements of this drama. The arbitrary will of her father, which fetters Portia's inclination, and robs her of all participation in the choice of a husband, rests certainly upon paternal right; but even this right, when carried to an extreme, becomes the highest injustice. The injustice which lies in the enforcement of this paternal right would have fallen with tragical weight, if *chance* had not conducted it to a fortunate issue. The flight and marriage of Jessica, against her father's will, comprehends a manifest injustice. Nevertheless, who will condemn her for having withdrawn herself from the power of such a father? In the sentence laid upon the Jew, by which he is compelled to recognise the marriage of his daughter, is again reflected the precept—*Summum jus, summa injuria*; right and unright are here so closely driven up into the same limit, that they are no longer separated, but immediately pass over one to the other. Thus we see that the different, and apparently heterogeneous, events unite themselves in the whole into one point. They are only variations of the same theme. All human life is a great lawsuit; where right is received as the centre and basis of our being. From this point of view proceeds the drama. But, the more this basis is built upon, the more insecure does it exhibit itself. Unquestionably, right and law ought to uphold and strengthen human life. But they are not its basis and true centre. In them the whole truth of human existence does not lie inclosed. In their one-sidedness right becomes unright, and unright becomes right. Law and right have their legality and truth, not through and in themselves; but they rest upon the higher principles of the true morality, from which they issue only as single rays. Man has in and for himself no rights, but only duties. But, at the same time, against others his duties are rights; and there is no true living right that does not include, and may be itself indeed, a duty. Not upon right, then, but upon heavenly grace, rests the human being and life. The union of the human with the Divine will is the true animating morality of mankind—through which right and un-

right first receive their value and significance. Shakspeare indicates this in the following beautiful verses:—

“The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
It droppeth, as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd;
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes:
’T is mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest
God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this—
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to
render
The deeds of mercy.”

We have thus very briefly, and, therefore, somewhat imperfectly, exhibited the views of Dr. Ulrici, with reference to the idea in which this drama is conceived. They belong to that philosophy which, whether for praise or for blame, has been called transcendental. We cannot avoid expressing our opinion that, although Shakspeare might not have proposed to himself so *systematic* a display of the contest that is unremittingly going forward in the world between our conventional and our natural being, he did intend to represent the anomalies that have always existed between the circumstances by which human agents are surrounded and the higher motives by which they should act. And this idea, as it appears to us, is the basis of the large toleration which belongs to this drama, amidst its seeming intolerance. Men are to be judged upon a higher principle than belongs to mere edicts,—by and through all the associations amidst which they have been nurtured, and by which they have been impelled. We select a case or two in point.

Antonio is one of the most beautiful of Shakspeare's characters. He does not take a

very prominent part in the drama: he is a sufferer rather than an actor. We view him, in the outset, rich, liberal, surrounded with friends; yet he is unhappy. He has higher aspirations than those which ordinarily belong to one dependent upon the chances of commerce; and this uncertainty, as we think, produces his unhappiness. He will not acknowledge the forebodings of evil which come across his mind. Ulrici says, "It was the over-great magnitude of his earthly riches, which, although his heart was by no means dependent upon their amount, unconsciously confined the free flight of his soul." We doubt if Shakspeare meant this. He has addressed the reproof of that state of mind to Portia, from the lips of Nerissa:—

Por. By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is a-weary of this great world.

Ner. You would be, sweet madam, if your miseries were in the same abundance as your good fortunes are: And yet, for aught I see, *they are as sick that surfeit with too much, as they that starve with nothing.*"

Antonio may say—

"In sooth, I know not why I am so sad;"

but his reasoning denial of the cause of his sadness is a proof to us that the foreboding of losses—

"Enough to press a royal merchant down,"—

is at the bottom of his sadness. It appears to us a self-delusion, which his secret nature rejects, that he says,—

"My ventures are not in one bottom trusted,
Nor to one place; nor is my whole estate
Upon the fortune of this present year:
Therefore, my merchandize makes me not
sad."

When he has given the fatal bond, he has a sort of desperate confidence, which to us looks very unlike assured belief:—

"Why, fear not, man; I will not forfeit it;
Within these two months, that's a month
before
This bond expires, *I do expect* return
Of thrice three times the value of this bond."

And, finally, when his calamity has become a real thing, and not a shadowy notion, his

deportment shows that his mind has been long familiar with images of ruin:—

"Give me your hand, Bassanio; fare you well!
Grieve not that I am fallen to this for you;
For herein fortune shows herself more kind
Than is her custom: it is still her use,
To let the wretched man outlive his wealth,
To view, with hollow eye and wrinkled brow,
An age of poverty; from which lingering
penance
Of such misery doth she cut me off."

The generosity of Antonio's nature unfitted him for a contest with the circumstances amid which his lot was cast. The Jew says—

"In low simplicity,
He lends out money gratis."

He himself says—

"I oft deliver'd from his forfeitures
Many that have at times made moan to me."

Bassanio describes him as—

"The kindest man,
The best condition'd and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies."

To such a spirit, whose "means are in supposition"—whose ventures are "squander'd abroad"—the curse of the Jew must have sometimes presented itself to his own prophetic mind:—

"This is the fool that lends out money gratis."

Antonio and his position are not in harmony. But there is something else discordant in Antonio's mind. This kind friend, this generous benefactor, this gentle spirit, this man "unwearied in doing courtesies," can outrage and insult a fellow-creature, because he is of another creed:—

Shy. Fair sir, you spet on me on Wednesday last;

You spurn'd me such a day; another time
You call'd me dog; and for these courtesies
I'll lend you thus much monies.

Ant. I am as like to call thee so again,
To spet on thee again, to spurn thee too."

Was it without an object that Shakspeare made this man, so entitled to command our affections and our sympathy, act so unworthy a part, and not be ashamed of the act? Most assuredly the poet did not intend to justify

the indignities which were heaped upon Shylock; for in the very strongest way he has made the Jew remember the insult in the progress of his wild revenge:—

“Thou call’dst me dog, before thou hadst a cause:

But, since I am a dog, beware my fangs.”

Here, to our minds, is the first of the lessons of charity which this play teaches. Antonio is as much to be pitied for his prejudices as the Jew for his. They had both been nurtured in evil opinions. They had both been surrounded by influences which more or less held in subjection their better natures. The honoured Christian is as intolerant as the despised Jew. The one habitually pursues with injustice the subjected man that he has been taught to loathe; the other, in the depths of his subtle obstinacy, seizes upon the occasion to destroy the powerful man that he has been compelled to fear. The companions of Antonio exhibit, more or less, the same reflection of the prejudices which have become to them a second nature. They are not so gross in their prejudices as Launcelot, to whom “the Jew is the very devil incarnation.” But to Lorenzo, who is about to marry his daughter, Shylock is a “faithless Jew.” When the unhappy father is bereft of all that constituted the solace of his home, and before he has manifested that spirit of revenge which might well call for indignation and contempt, he is to the gentlemanly Solanio “the villain Jew,” and “the dog Jew.” When the unhappy man speaks of his daughter’s flight, he is met with a brutal jest on the part of Salarino, who, within his own circle, is the pleasantest of men;—“I, for my part, knew the tailor that made the wings she flew withal.” We can understand the reproaches that are heaped upon Shylock in the trial scene as something that might come out of the depths of any passion-stirred nature: but the habitual contempt with which he is treated by men who in every other respect are gentle and good-humoured and benevolent is a proof to us that Shakspeare meant to represent the struggle that must inevitably ensue, in a condition of society where the innate sense of justice is deadened

in the powerful by those hereditary prejudices which make cruelty virtue; and where the powerless, invested by accident with the means of revenge, say with Shylock, “The villainy you teach me I will execute; and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.” The climax of this subjection of our higher and better natures to conventional circumstances is to be found in the character of the Jew’s daughter. Young, agreeable, intelligent, formed for happiness, she is shut up by her father in a dreary solitude. One opposed to her in creed gains her affections; and the ties which bind the father and the child are broken for ever. But they are not broken without compunction:—

“Alack! what heinous sin is it in me

To be ashamed to be my father’s child!”

This is nature. But when she has fled from him, robbed him, spent fourscore ducats in one night, given his turquoise for a monkey, and, finally, revealed his secrets, with an evasion of the ties that bound them which makes one’s flesh creep,—

“When I was *with him*,”—

we see the poor girl plunged into the most wretched contest between her duties and her pleasures by the force of external circumstances. We grant, then, to all these our compassion; for they commit injustice ignorantly, and through a force which they cannot withstand. Is the Jew himself not to be measured by the same rule? We believe that it was Shakspeare’s intention so to measure him.

When Pope exclaimed of Macklin’s performance of Shylock,—

“This is the Jew

That Shakspeare drew!”

the higher philosophy of Shakspeare was little appreciated. Macklin was, no doubt, from all traditionary report of him, perfectly capable of representing the subtlety of the Jew’s malice and the energy of his revenge. But it is a question with us whether he perceived, or indeed if any actor ever efficiently represented, the more delicate traits of character that lie beneath these two great

passions of the Jew's heart. Look, for example, at the extraordinary mixture of the personal and the national in his dislike of Antonio. He hates him for his gentle manners:—

“How like a fawning publican he looks!”

He hates him, “for he is a Christian;”—he hates him, for that “he lends out money gratis;”—but he hates him more than all, because

“He hates our sacred nation.”

It is this national feeling which, when carried in a right direction, makes a patriot and a hero, that assumes in Shylock the aspect of a grovelling and fierce personal revenge. He has borne insult and injury “with a patient shrug;” but ever in small matters he has been seeking retribution:—

“I am not bid for love; they flatter me:
But yet I'll go in hate, to feed upon
The prodigal Christian.”

The mask is at length thrown off—he has the Christian in his power; and his desire of revenge, mean and ferocious as it is, rises into sublimity, through the unconquerable energy of the oppressed man's wilfulness. “I am a Jew: Hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? if you poison us, do we not die? and, if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.” It is impossible, after this exposition of his feelings, that we should not feel that he has properly cast the greater portion of the odium which belongs to his actions upon the social circumstances by which he has been hunted into madness. He has been made the thing he is by society. In the extreme wildness of his anger, when he utters the harrowing imprecation,—“I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear! 'would she were hearsed at my foot, and the ducats in her

coffin,” the tenderness that belongs to our common humanity, even in its most passionate forgetfulness of the dearest ties, comes across him in the remembrance of the mother of that execrated child:—“Out upon her! Thou torturest me, Tubal: it was my turquoise; I had it of Leah when I was a bachelor.”

It is in the conduct of the trial scene that, as it appears to us, is to be sought the concentration of Shakspeare's leading idea in the composition of this drama. The merchant stands before the Jew a better and a wiser man than when he called him “dog:”—

“I do oppose
My patience to his fury; and am arm'd
To suffer, with a quietness of spirit,
The very tyranny and rage of his.”

Misfortune has corrected the influences which, in happier moments, allowed him to forget the gentleness of his nature, and to heap unmerited abuse upon him whose badge was sufferance. The Jew is unchanged. But, if Shakspeare in the early scenes made us entertain some compassion for his wrongs, he has now left him to bear all the indignation which we ought to feel against one “incapable of pity.” But we cannot despise the Jew. His intellectual vigour rises supreme over the mere reasonings by which he is opposed. He defends his own injustice by the example of as great an injustice of every-day occurrence—and no one ventures to answer him:—

“You have among you many a purchas'd slave,
Which, like your asses, and your dogs, and mules,
You use in abject and in slavish parts,
Because you bought them:—Shall I say to you,
Let them be free, marry them to your heirs?
Why sweat they under burthens? let their beds
Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates
Be season'd with such viands? You will
answer,
The slaves are ours:—So do I answer you.
The pound of flesh, which I demand of him,
Is dearly bought; 't is mine, and I will
have it:
If you deny me, fie upon your law!”

It would have been exceedingly difficult for

the Merchant to have escaped from the power of the obdurate man, so strong in the letter of the law, and so resolute to carry it out by the example of his judges in other matters, had not the law been found here, as in most other cases, capable of being bent to the will of its administrators. Had it been the inflexible thing which Shylock required it to be, a greater injustice would have been committed than the Jew had finally himself to suffer. Mrs. Jameson has very justly and ingeniously described the struggle which Portia had to sustain in abandoning the high ground which she took in her great address to the Jew;—"She maintains at first a calm self-command, as one sure of carrying her point in the end: yet the painful heart-thrilling uncertainty in which she keeps the whole court, until suspense verges upon agony, is not contrived for effect merely; it is necessary and inevitable. She has two objects in view: to deliver her husband's friend, and to maintain her husband's honour by the discharge of his just debt, though paid out of her own wealth ten times over. It is evident that she would rather owe the safety of Antonio to anything rather than the legal quibble with which her cousin Bellario has armed her, and which she reserves as a last resource. Thus all the speeches addressed to Shylock, in the first instance, are either direct or indirect experiments on his temper and feelings. She must be understood, from the beginning to the end, as examining with intense anxiety the effect of her own words on his mind and countenance; as watching for that relenting spirit which she hopes to awaken either by reason or persuasion."*

Had Shylock relented after that most beautiful appeal to his mercy, which Shakspeare has here placed as the exponent of the higher principle upon which all law and right are essentially dependent, the real moral of the drama would have been destroyed. The weight of injuries transmitted to Shylock from his forefathers, and still heaped upon him even by the best of those by whom he was surrounded, was not so easily to become light, and to cease to exasperate his nature. Nor would it have

been a true picture of society in the sixteenth century had the poet shown the judges of the Jew wholly magnanimous in granting him the mercy which he denied to the Christian. We certainly do not agree with the Duke, in his address to Shylock, that the conditions upon which his life is spared are imposed—

"That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit."

Nor do we think that Shakspeare meant to hold up these conditions as anything better than examples of the mode in which the strong are accustomed to deal with the weak. There is still something discordant in this, the real catastrophe of the drama. It could not be otherwise, and yet be true to nature.

But how artistically has the poet restored the balance of pleasureable sensations! Throughout the whole conduct of the play, what may be called its tragic portion has been relieved by the romance which belongs to the personal fate of Portia. But, after the great business of the drama is wound up, we fall back upon a repose which is truly refreshing and harmonious. From the lips of Lorenzo and Jessica, as they sit in the "paler day" of an Italian moon, are breathed the lighter strains of the most playful poetry, mingled with the highest flights of the most elevated. Music and the odours of sweet flowers are around them. Happiness is in their hearts. Their thoughts are lifted by the beauties of the earth above the earth. This delicious scene belongs to what is universal and eternal, and takes us far away from those bitter strifes of our social state which are essentially narrow and temporary. And then come the affectionate welcomes, the pretty, pouting contests, and the happy explanations of Portia and Nerissa with Bassanio and Gratiano. Here again we are removed into a sphere where the calamities of fortune, and the injustice of man warring against man, may be forgotten. The poor Merchant is once more happy. The "gentle spirit" of Portia is perhaps the happiest, for she has triumphantly concluded a work as religious as her pretended pilgrimage "by holy crosses." To use the words of Dr. Ulrici, "the sharp contrarieties of right and unright are played out."

* * *Characteristics of Women*, vol. i. p. 75.

CHAPTER V.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

'MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING' was first printed in 1600. It had been entered at Stationers' Hall on the 23rd of August of the same year. The first edition is not divided into acts; but in the folio of 1623 we find this division. There was no other separate edition. The variations between the text of the quarto and that of the folio are very few. There is a remarkable peculiarity, however, in the text of the folio, which indicates very clearly that it was printed from the playhouse copy. In the second act (Scene 3) we find this stage-direction:—"Enter Prince, Leonato, Claudio, and *Jack Wilson*." In the third act, when the two inimitable guardians of the night first descend upon the solid earth in Messina, to move mortals for ever after with unextinguishable laughter, they speak to us in their well-known names of Dogberry and Verges; but in the fourth act we find the names of mere human actors prefixed to what they say: Dogberry becomes *Kempe*, and Verges *Cowley*. Here, then, we have a piece of the prompter's book before us. Balthazar, with his "Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more," is identified with Jack Wilson; and Kempe and Cowley have come down to posterity in honourable association with the two illustrious "comparters of the watch." We could almost believe that the play-editors of the folio in 1623 purposely left these anomalous entries as an historical tribute to the memory of their fellows. Kempe, we know, had been dead some years before the publication of the folio; and probably Cowley and Jack Wilson had also gone where the voice of their merriment and their minstrelsy was heard no more.

The chronology of this comedy is sufficiently fixed by the circumstance of its publication in 1600, coupled with the fact that it is not mentioned by Meres in 1598.

"The story is taken from Ariosto," says Pope. To Ariosto then we turn; and we are repaid for our labour by the pleasure of reading that long but by no means tedious story of Genevra, which occupies the whole of the fifth book, and part of the sixth, of the '*Orlando Furioso*.' "The tale is a pretty comical matter," as Harrington quaintly pronounces it. The famous town of St. Andrew's forms its scene; and here was enacted something like that piece of villainy by which the Claudio of Shakspeare was deceived, and his Hero "done to death by slanderous tongues." In Harrington's good old translation of the '*Orlando*' there are six-and-forty pictures, as there are six-and-forty books; and, says the translator, "they are all cut in brass, and most of them by the best workmen in that kind that have been in this land this many years: yet I will not praise them too much because I gave direction for their making." The witty godson of Queen Elizabeth—"that merry poet, my godson"—adds, "the use of the picture is evident, which is, that having read over the book you may read it as it were *again* in the very picture." He might have said, you may read it as it were *before*; and if we had copied this picture,—in which the whole action of the book is exhibited at once in a bird's eye view, and where yet, as he who gave "direction for its making" truly says, "the personages of men, the shapes of horses, and such like, are made large at the bottom and lesser upward,"—our readers would have seen at a glance how far "the story is taken from Ariosto." For here we have, "large at the bottom," a fair one at a window, looking lovingly upon a man who is ascending a ladder of ropes, whilst at the foot of the said ladder an unhappy wight is about to fall upon his sword, from which fate he is with difficulty arrested by one who is struggling with him.

We here see at once the resemblance between the story in Ariosto and the incident in 'Much Ado about Nothing' upon which both the tragic and comic interest of the play hinges. But here the resemblance ceases. As we ascend the picture, we see the King of Scotland seated upon a royal throne,—but no Dogberry; his disconsolate daughter is placed by his side,—but there is no veiled Hero; King, and Princess, and courtiers, and people, are looking upon a tilting-ground, where there is a fierce and deadly encounter of two mailed knights,—but there is no Beatrice and no Benedick. The truth is, that Ariosto found the incident of a lady betrayed to suspicion and danger, by the personation of her own waiting-woman, amongst the popular traditions of the south of Europe—this story has been traced to Spain; and he interwove it with the adventures of his Rinaldo as an integral part of his chivalrous romance. The lady *Genevra*, so falsely accused, was doomed to die unless a true knight came within a month to do battle for her honour. Her lover, *Ariodant*, had fled, and was reported to have perished. The wicked duke, *Polinesso*, who had betrayed *Genevra*, appears secure in his treachery. But the misguided woman, *Dalinda*, who had been the instrument of his crime, flying from her paramour, meets with *Rinaldo*, and declares the truth; and then comes the combat, in which the guilty duke is slain by the champion of innocence, and the lover re-appears to be made happy with his spotless princess.

The motive which influences the *Polinesso* of Ariosto is the hope that by vilifying the character of *Genevra* he may get rid of his rival in her love. Spenser has told a similar story in the 'Faerie Queene' (Book II., Canto IV.), in which *Phedon* describes the like treachery of his false friend *Philemon*. The motive here was not very unlike that of Don John in 'Much Ado about Nothing.'

The European story, which Ariosto and Spenser have thus adopted, has formed also the groundwork of one of Bandello's Italian novels. And here the wronged lady has neither her honour vindicated in battle, as

in Ariosto; nor is slain by her furious lover, as in Spenser; but she is rejected, believed to be dead, and finally married in disguise, as in 'Much Ado about Nothing.'

Ariosto made this story a tale of chivalry; Spenser a lesson of high and solemn morality; Bandello an interesting love-romance. It was for Shakspeare to surround the main incident with those accessories which he could nowhere borrow, and to make of it such a comedy as no other man has made—a comedy not of manners or of sentiment, but of *life* viewed under its profoundest aspects, whether of the grave or the ludicrous.

We request thee, O gentle reader, to imagine—for, as a lover of Shakspeare, thou canst imagine—that thou wert extant in the year of grace 1600; and that on a fine summer's morning of that year, as thou wert painfully guiding thy palfrey amongst the deep ruts and muddy channels of Cheapside, thou didst tarry in thy pilgrimage for a few minutes to peruse a small printed bill affixed upon a post, which bore something like the following announcement:—

BY THE RIGHT HONOURABLE THE LORD
CHAMBERLAINE HIS SERVANTS,
AT THE GLOBE THEATRE AT BANKSIDE,
*This day, being Tuesday, July 11, 1600, will
be acted,*
MUCH ADOE ABOUT NOTHING,
WRITTEN BY WILLIAM SHAKSPERE.

This, thou seest—for thou art cognizant of the present time as well as imaginative of the past—is not a bill as big as a house, the smallest letters of which are afflicted with elephantiasis; nor is it a bill which talks of "prodigious hit" and "thunders of applause," nor in which you see Mr. William Kempe's name towering in red letters above all his fellows: but a modest, quiet, little bill—an innocent bill—which ought not to have provoked the abuse of the Puritans, that "players, by sticking of their bills in London, defile the streets with their infectious filthiness."* In reading this bill thou receivest especially into thy mind three ideas which set thee thinking—the company

* 'Mirror of Monsters,' 1587.

of actors who perform the play, the name of the play to be performed, the name of the writer. Thou knowest that it is the best company, and the best writer, of the day; but the play—is the play a tragedy, or a history, or a comedy? Thou opinest that it is a comedy. If the title were '*Much Ado*' thou wouldst be puzzled; but '*Much Ado about Nothing*' lets thee into a secret. Thou knowest, assuredly, that the author of the play will take the spectators into his confidence; that he will show them the preparation, and the bustle, and the turmoil, and it may be the distress, of some domestic event, or chain of events,—the '*Much Ado*' to the actors of the events, who have not the thread of the labyrinth; but, to the spectators, who sit with the book of fate open before them,—who know how all this begins and expect how it will all end,—it is '*Much Ado about Nothing*.' It is a comedy, then; in which surprise is for the actors,—expectation is for the audience. Thou wilt cross London Bridge and see this comedy; for, "as the feeling with which we startle at a shooting star, compared with that of watching the sunrise at the pre-established moment, such and so low is surprise compared with expectation."*

We have no wish to *tutoyer* the gentle reader any farther. We have desired only to show the significance of the title of this play, by exhibiting it in slight connection with the circumstances under which it was published. For the title of this comedy, rightly considered, is the best expositor of the idea of this comedy. Dr. Ulrici, employing a dialect with which the English ear is not quite familiar, tells us that the fundamental idea lies in the antithesis which the play exhibits of the objective reality of human life to its subjective aspect. An able anonymous writer translates this for us into more intelligible language:—"He considers the play as a representation of the contrast and contradiction between life in its real essence and the aspect which it presents to those who are engaged in its struggle."† The "subjective aspect," then, is the '*Much*

Ado;' the "objective reality" the '*about Nothing*.' The reviewer has given us clearly and concisely the results to which the inquiry, pursued upon this principle, has conducted the German critic. The contradiction between life and its aspects "is set forth in an acted commentary on the title of the drama;—a series of incidents which, in themselves neither real, nor strange, nor important, are regarded by the actors as being all these things. The war at the opening, it is said, begins without reason and ends without result; Don Pedro seems to woo Hero for himself, while he gains her for his friend; Benedick and Beatrice, after carrying on a merry campaign of words without real enmity, are entrapped into a marriage without real love: the leading story rests in a seeming faithlessness, and its results are a seeming death and funeral, a challenge which produces no fighting, and a marriage in which the bride is a pretender; and the weakness and shadowiness of human wishes and plans are exposed with yet more cutting irony in the means that bring about the fortunate catastrophe,—an incident in which the unwitting agents—headed by Dogberry, the very representative of the idea of the piece—are the lowest and most stupid characters of the whole group." The reviewer adds—"The poet's readers may hesitate in following his speculative critic the whole way in this journey to the temple of abstract truth." There are many of the poet's readers who will altogether reject this abstract mode of examining his works. To them the "abstract truth" appears but as a devious and uncertain glimmering—a taper in the sunshine. Have we not in Shakspeare, say they, high poetry, sparkling wit, the deepest pathos? are not the characters well defined, adroitly grouped; his plots interesting, his incidents skilfully evolved? True. And so, in nature, we have sky and water, and the forms and colours of leafy trees, and quiet dells, and fertile fields, and dewy lawns, and brilliant flowers; and we can understand the loveliness of separate objects, and we partly see how they form what the eye calls a picture. But there comes an artist, and

* Coleridge, 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 78.

† 'Edinburgh Review,' July, 1840.

he sets us to look at the same objects from another point of view; and he watches a moment when there is a sunny gleam upon this part of the landscape, and a softened shade upon the other part; and he tells us to look again with the eye of his technical knowledge,—and the scene has become altogether *picturesque*; and, when we have habituated ourselves to this mode of viewing the works of nature, we have acquired almost a new sense. So it is with the works of the poet: he looks upon nature, and copies nature, not with a camera-lucida fidelity, but with the higher truth of his own art; and, till we have arrived at something like a comprehension of the principle of harmony in which he works, we are not qualified to judge of his work as a whole, however we may be pleased with many of its details. With regard to Shakspeare, a great deal of the false judgment upon his powers, which has long passed current, is to be traced to the utter blindness of the critics to the presence of any pervading idea running through a particular work, which should illuminate all its parts. Had the Zoili of the last generation conceived that Shakspeare worked upon some principle which, like the agencies of nature, was to be seen more in its effects than in its manifestation of itself, could such a sentence as this have been written of the comedy before us?—"This fable, absurd and ridiculous as it is, was drawn from the foregoing story of Genevra, in Ariosto's 'Orlando Furioso,' a fiction which, as it is managed by the epic poet, is neither improbable nor unnatural; but by Shakespear mangled and defaced, full of inconsistencies, contradictions, and blunders."* We have done with this style of criticism, of course, now; but it has only been banished by the disposition of the world to look at Shakspeare's art, and at all art, a little more from the abstract point of view.

But Mrs. Lenox, who, in default of a sense of the poetical picturesque, has thus told us of "inconsistencies, contradictions, and blunders,"—and who is farther pleased to say that Shakspeare, in this play, "borrowed just enough to show his poverty of invention,

and added enough to prove his want of judgment"—this lady even is not insensible to the merits of *parts* of the composition: "There is a great deal of true wit and humour in the comic scenes of this play; the characters of Benedick and Beatrice are properly marked." But there are critics, and those of a higher order, who do not quite agree with Mrs. Lenox in giving to Shakspeare this comparatively small merit. Mr. Campbell tells us,—"during one half of the play we have a *disagreeable female character* in that of Beatrice. Her portrait, I may be told, is deeply drawn and minutely finished. It is; and so is that of Benedick, who is entirely her counterpart, except that he is less disagreeable. But the best drawn portraits, by the finest masters, may be admirable in execution, though unpleasant to contemplate; and Beatrice's portrait is in this category *She is an odious woman.*"* With every respect for a poet's opinion of a poet's work, we presume to think that Mr. Campbell has fallen into a mistake; and that his mistake arises from his contemplation of Beatrice as a single *portrait* cut out of a large picture, and not viewed in reference to its relative position with, and its dependence upon, the other parts of that picture. For, in truth, whether Beatrice be disagreeable and odious, or "*cette charmante et redoutable femme*," as a French critic has it, she could be no other than the identical Beatrice, in the place in which she is. For is she not one that *at first* presents to us the prosaic side of human nature—the jesting, gibing, sarcastic side; one who has no faith in valour, and is not to be subdued by courtesy; who prefers a "skirmish of wit" to making "account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?" But is not the *real* Beatrice at bottom a true woman,—a high-spirited, imaginative woman,—one who, with all her wit, has no slight portion of woman's sensibility about her; and is by no means very gay when she says "I may sit in a corner, and cry, heigh ho! for a husband?" Truly she is a woman that falls into the trap of affection with wonderful alacrity; who, while hidden in

* 'Shakespear Illustrated,' vol. iii. p. 261.

* Moxon's Edition of Shakspeare. Life.

"the pleached bower,
Where honeysuckles, ripen'd by the sun,
Forbid the sun to enter,"

hears it said of her, and hears it without any violence or burst of passion,

"Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprising what they look on; and her wit
Values itself so highly, that to her
All matter else seems weak: she cannot love,
Nor take no shape nor project of affection,
She is so self-endear'd."

And why is she so calm under this bitter reproach, which she believes to be real? Why shows she no after resentment against her cousin for the representation which she has drawn of her? Simply because she knows she has been playfully wearing a mask to hide the real strength of her sympathies.

"Contempt, farewell! and maiden pride, adieu!"

She is not a thing of mere negations; a fashionable, brilliant, untrusting thing. It is she whom we next encounter, all heart, presenting to us the poetical side of human nature, when all around her is prosaic; who, when her cousin's wedding "looks not like a nuptial," and that poor innocent Hero is deserted by lover and father, has alone the courage to say,

"Oh, on my soul, my cousin is belied."

It is the injury done to Hero which wrings from Beatrice the avowal of her love for Benedick. Is it a reproach to her that she would have her lover peril his life against the false accuser of her cousin? She has thrown off her maidenly disguises, and the earnestness of her soul will have vent. She and Benedick are now bound for ever in their common pity for the unfortunate. The *conventional* Beatrice has become the *actual* Beatrice. The "subjective appearance" has become the "objective reality." The same process is repeated throughout the character of Benedick, for the original groundwork of the character is the same as that of Beatrice. "Would you have me speak *after my custom*, as being a professed tyrant to their sex," presents the same key to his character as "I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow,

than a man swear he loves me," does to that of Beatrice. They are each acting; and they have each a shrewd guess that the other is acting; and each is in the other's thoughts; and the stratagem by which they are each entrapped—not, as we think, into an *unreal* love, as Ulrici says—is precisely in its symmetrical simplicity what was necessary to get rid of their reciprocal disguises, and to make them straightforward and in earnest. The conclusion of the affair is the playful echo of all that is past:—

"*Bene.* Come, I will have thee; but, by this light, I take thee for pity.

Beat. I would not deny you; but, by this good day, I yield upon great persuasion."

The 'Much Ado about Nothing' was acted under the name of 'Benedick and Beatrice,' even during the life of its author. These two characters absorb very much of the acting interest of the play. They are star-characters, suited for the Garricks and Jordans to display themselves in. But they cannot be separated from the play without being liable to misconstruction. The character of Beatrice cannot be understood, except in connection with the injuries done to Hero; and except, once again, we view it, as well as the characters of all the other agents in the scene, with reference to the one leading idea, that there is a real aspect of things which is to be seen by the audience and not seen by the agents. The character of Don John, for example, and the characters of his loose confederates, are understood by the spectators; and their villainy is purposely transparent. Without Don John the plot could not move. He is not a rival in Claudio's love, as the "wicked duke" of Ariosto: he is simply a moody, ill-conditioned, spiteful rascal:—such a one as ordinarily takes to backbiting and hinting away character. Shakspeare gets rid of him as soon as he can: he fires the train and disappears. He would be out of harmony with the happiness which he has suspended but not destroyed; and so he passes from the stage, with

"Think not on him till to-morrow."

But his instrumentality has been of the utmost

importance. It has given us that beautiful altar-scene, that would be almost too tragical if we did not know that the "Much Ado" was "about Nothing." But that maiden's sorrows, and that father's passion, are real aspects of life, however unreal be the cause of them. The instrumentality, too, of the hateful Don John has given us Dogberry and Verges. Coleridge has said, somewhat hastily we think,—"any other less ingeniously absurd watchmen and night-constables would have answered the mere necessities of the action." Surely not. Make Dogberry in the slightest degree less self-satisfied, loquacious, full of the official stuff of which functionaries are still cut out, and the action breaks down before the rejection of Hero by her lover. For it is not the ingenious absurdity that prevents the detection of the plot against Hero; it is the absurdity which prevents the prompt disclosure of it after the detection. Let us take a passage of this inimitable piece of comedy to read apart, that we may see how entirely the character of Dogberry is necessary to the continuance of the action. When Borachio and Conrade are overheard and arrested, the spectators have an amiable hope that the mischief of Don John's plot will be prevented; but when Dogberry and Verges approach Leonato, the end, as they think, is pretty sure. Let us see how the affair really works:—

Leon. Neighbours, you are tedious.

Dogb. It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers; but, truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a king I could find in my heart to bestow it all of your worship.

Leon. All thy tediousness on me! ha!

Dogb. Yea, and 't were a thousand times more than 't is: for I hear as good exclamation on your worship as of any man in the city; and though I be but a poor man I am glad to hear it.

Verg. And so am I.

Leon. I would fain know what you have to say.

Verg. Marry, sir, our watch to-night, excepting your worship's presence, have ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

Dogb. A good old man, sir; he will be talking; as they say, When the age is in, the

wit is out; God help us! it is a world to see!—Well said, i' faith, neighbour Verges:—well, God's a good man; and two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind:—An honest soul, i' faith, sir; by my troth he is, as ever broke bread: but God is to be worshipped: All men are not alike; alas, good neighbour!

Leon. Indeed, neighbour, he comes too short of you.

Dogb. Gifts, that God gives.

Leon. I must leave you."

Truly did Don Pedro subsequently say, "This learned constable is too cunning to be understood." The wise fellow, and the rich fellow, and the fellow that hath had losses, and one that hath two gowns, and everything handsome about him, nevertheless holds his prisoners fast; and when he comes to the Prince, with "Marry, sir, they have committed false report; moreover, they have spoken untruths; secondarily, they are slanders; sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady; thirdly, they have verified unjust things; and, to conclude, they are lying knaves," though his method be not logical, his matter is all-sufficient. And so we agree with Ulrici, that it would be a palpable misunderstanding to ask what the noble constable Dogberry and his followers have to do with the play. Dogberry is as necessary as all the other personages;—to a certain degree more necessary. The passionate lover, the calm and sagacious Prince, the doting father, were the dupes of a treachery, not well compact, and carried through by dangerous instruments. They make no effort to detect what would not have been very difficult of detection: they are satisfied to quarrel and to lament. Accident discovers what intelligence could not penetrate; and the treacherous slander is manifest in all its blackness to the wise Dogberry:—

"Flat burglary as ever was committed."

Here is the crowning irony of the philosophical poet. The *players* of the game of life see nothing, or see minute parts only: but the dullest *by-stander* has glimpses of something more.

In studying a play of Shakspeare with the assurance that we have possessed ourselves of

the fundamental "idea" in which it was composed, it is remarkable how many incidents and expressions which have previously appeared to us at least difficult of comprehension are rendered clear and satisfactory. As *believers* in Shakspeare we know that he wrought in the spirit of the highest art, producing in every case a work of *unity*, out of the power of his own "multiformity." But, as we have before said, we have not always, as in the case of the natural landscape, got the right point of view, so as to have the perfect harmony of the composition made manifest to us. Let us be assured, however,

that there is an entirety, and therefore a perfect accordance in all its parts, in every great production of a great poet,—and above all in every production of the world's greatest poet; and then, studying with this conviction, when the parts have become familiar to us—as in the case before us, the sparkling raillery of Benedick and Beatrice, the patient gentleness of Hero, the most truthful absurdity of Dogberry—they gradually fuse themselves together in our minds, and the *whole* at last lies clear before us,

"A world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

THE first edition of this play was published in 1602. The same copy was reprinted in 1619. The comedy, as it now stands, first appeared in the folio of 1623; and the play in that edition contains very nearly twice the number of lines that the quarto contains. The succession of scenes is the same in both copies, except in one instance; but the speeches of the several characters are greatly elaborated in the amended copy, and some of these characters are not only heightened, but new distinctive features given to them. For example, the *Slender* of the present comedy—one of the most perfect of the minor characters of Shakspeare—is a very inferior conception in the first copy. Our *Slender* has been worked up out of the first rough sketch, with touches at once delicate and powerful. Again, the *Justice Shallow* of the quarto is an amusing person—but he is not the present *Shallow*; we have not even the repetitions which identify him with the *Shallow* of 'Henry IV.' We point out these matters here, for the purpose of showing that, although the quarto of 1602 was most probably piratically published when the play had been remodelled, and was reprinted

without alteration in 1619 (the amended copy then remaining unpublished), the copy of that first edition must not be considered as an imperfect transcript of the complete play. The differences between the two copies are produced by the alterations of the author working upon his first sketch. The extent of these changes and elaborations can only be satisfactorily perceived by comparing the two copies, scene by scene. As an example, we subjoin the scene at Herne's Oak, which has no doubt been completely rewritten:—

QUARTO OF 1602.

"Qui. You fairies that do haunt these shady groves,

Look round about the wood if you can spy
A mortal that doth haunt our sacred round:
If such a one you can espy, give him his due,
And leave not till you pinch him black and blue.

Give them their charge, Puck, ere they part away.

Sir Hugh. Come hither, Peane, go to the country houses,

And when you find a slut that lies asleep,
And all her dishes foul, and room unswept,

With your long nails pinch her till she cry,
And swear to mend her sluttish housewifery.

Fai. I warrant you, I will perform your will.

Hu. Where's Pead? Go and see where
brokers sleep,

And fox-eyed serjeants, with their mace,
Go lay the proctors in the street,
And pinch the lousy serjeant's face:

Spare none of these when th' are a bed,
But such whose nose looks blue and red.

Qui. Away, begone, his mind fulfil,
And look that none of you stand still.
Some do that thing, some do this,
All do something, none amiss.

Sir Hugh. I smell a man of middle earth.

Fal. God bless me from that Welsh fairy.

Qui. Look every one about this round,
And if that any here be found,
For his presumption in this place,
Spare neither leg, arm, head, nor face.

Sir Hugh. See, I have spied one by good luck,
His body man, his head a buck.

Fal. God send me good fortune now, and I
care not.

Qui. Go straight, and do as I command,
And take a taper in your hand,
And set it to his fingers' ends,
And if you see it him offends,
And that he starteth at the flame,
Then is he mortal, know his name:
If with an F it doth begin,
Why then be sure he's full of sin.
About it then, and know the truth,
Of this same metamorphos'd youth.

Sir Hugh. Give me the tapers, I will try
And if that he love venery.

FOLIO OF 1623.

Qui. Fairies, black, grey, green, and white,
You moonshine-revellers, and shades of night,
You orphan-heirs of fixed destiny,
Attend your office and your quality.
Crier Hobgoblin, make the fairy eyes.

Pist. Elves, list your names; silence, you
airy toys.

Cricket, to Windsor chimneys shalt thou leap:
Where fires thou find'st unraked, and hearths
unswept,

There pinch the maids as blue as bilberry:
Our radiant queen hates sluts and sluttery.

Fal. They are fairies; he that speaks to
them shall die:

I'll wink and couch: no man their works must
eye.

[Lies down upon his face.]

Eva. Where's Pede?—Go you, and where
you find a maid,

That, ere she sleep, has thrice her prayers said,
Raise up the organs of her fantasy,
Sleep she as sound as careless infancy;
But those as sleep and think not on their sins,
Pinch them, arms, legs, backs, shoulders, sides,
and shins.

*Qu.** About, about;

Search Windsor-castle, elves, within and out:
Strew good luck, ouphes, on every sacred room;
That it may stand till the perpetual doom,
In state as wholesome, as in state 't is fit;
Worthy the owner, and the owner it.

The several chairs of order look you scour
With juice of balm, and every precious flower:
Each fair instalment, coat, and several crest,
With loyal blazon evermore be bless'd!
And nightly, meadow-fairies, look you sing,
Like to the Garter's compass, in a ring:
The expressure that it bears, green let it be,
More fertile-fresh than all the field to see;
And, *Hony soit qui mal y pense*, write,
In emerald tufts, flowers purple, blue and
white:

Like sapphire, pearl, and rich embroidery,
Buckled below fair knighthood's bending knee:
Fairies use flowers for their charactery.
Away; disperse: But, till 't is one o'clock,
Our dance of custom, round about the oak
Of Herne the Hunter, let us not forget.

Eva. Pray you, lock hand in hand; your-
selves in order set:

And twenty glow-worms shall our lanterns be,
To guide our measure round about the tree.
But stay: I smell a man of middle earth.

Fal. Heavens defend me from that Welsh
fairy!

Lest he transform me to a piece of cheese!

Pist. Vild worm, thou wast o'erlook'd even
in thy birth.

Qui. With trial-fire touch me his finger end.
If he be chaste, the flame will back descend
And turn him to no pain; but, if he start,
It is the flesh of a corrupted heart.

Pist. A trial, come.

Eva. Come, will this wood take fire?

[They burn him with their tapers.]

Fal. Oh, oh, oh!

* In the folio there is a distinction between the abbreviations of the names affixed to these speeches—*Qui.* and *Qu.* The one may be taken for *Quickly*—the other for *Queen*. It is certain that in the revised edition Anne was "to present the fairy queen."

Qui. Corrupt, corrupt, and tainted in desire!
About him, fairies; sing a scornful rhyme;
And, as you trip, still pinch him to your
time.

If the quarto is not to be taken as a guide in the formation of a text, it appears to us, viewed in connection with some circumstances which we shall venture to point out as heretofore in some degree unregarded, to be a highly interesting literary curiosity.

Malone, contrary to his opinion with regard to the quarto edition of 'Henry V.,' says of the quarto of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' "The old edition in 1602, like that of 'Romeo and Juliet,' is apparently a rough draught, and not a mutilated or imperfect copy." His view, therefore, of the period when this play was written applies to the "rough draught." Malone's opinion of the date of this sketch is thus stated in his 'Chronological Order:—

"The following line in the earliest edition of this comedy,

'Sail like my pinnace to those golden shores,' shows that it was written after Sir Walter Raleigh's return from Guiana in 1596.

"The first sketch of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' was printed in 1602. It was entered in the books of the Stationers' Company on the 18th of January, 1601–2, and was therefore probably written in 1601 after the two Parts of 'King Henry IV.,' being, it is said, composed at the desire of Queen Elizabeth, in order to exhibit Falstaff in love, when all the pleasantry which he could afford in any other situation was exhausted. But it may not be thought so clear that it was written after 'King Henry V.' Nym and Bardolph are both hanged in 'King Henry V.,' yet appear in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor.' Falstaff is disgraced in 'The Second Part of King Henry IV.,' and dies in 'King Henry V.;' but, in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' he talks as if he were yet in favour at court: 'If it should come to the ear of the court how I have been transformed,' &c.: and Mr. Page discountenances Fenton's addresses to his daughter because he 'kept company with the wild prince and with Pointz.' These circumstances seem to favour the supposition that this play was written between the First

and Second Parts of 'King Henry IV.' But that it was not written then may be collected from the tradition above mentioned. The truth, I believe, is, that, though it ought to be read (as Dr. Johnson has observed) between the 'Second Part of King Henry IV.' and 'King Henry V.,' it was written after 'King Henry V.,' and after Shakspeare had killed Falstaff. In obedience to the royal commands, having revived him, he found it necessary at the same time to revive all those persons with whom he was wont to be exhibited, Nym, Pistol, Bardolph, and the Page, and disposed of them as he found it convenient, without a strict regard to their situations or catastrophes in former plays."

The opinion that this comedy was written after the two Parts of 'Henry IV.' is not quite in consonance with the tradition that Queen Elizabeth desired to see Falstaff in love; for Shakspeare might have given this turn to the character in 'Henry V.,' after the announcement in the Epilogue to 'The Second Part of Henry IV.'—"our humble author will continue the story, with Sir John in it." Malone's theory, therefore, that it was produced after 'Henry V.,' is in accordance with the tradition as received by him with such an implicit belief. George Chalmers, however, in his 'Supplemental Apology,' laughs at the tradition, and at Malone's theory. He believes that the three historical plays and the comedy were successively written in 1596, and in 1597, but that 'Henry V.' was produced the last. He says, "In it ('Henry V.') Falstaff does not come out upon the stage, but dies of a sweat, after performing less than the attentive auditors were led to expect: and in it ancient Pistol appears as the husband of Mistress Quickly; who also dies, during the ancient's absence in the wars of France. Yet do the commentators bring the knight to life, and revive and unmarry the dame, by assigning the year 1601 as the epoch of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor.' Queen Elizabeth is said by the critics to have commanded these miracles to be worked in 1601,—a time when she was in no proper mood for such fooleries. The tradition on which is founded the story of Elizabeth's command to exhibit the facetious

knight in love, I think too improbable for belief." Chalmers goes on to argue that after Falstaff's disgrace at the end of 'The Second Part of Henry IV.' (which is followed in 'Henry V.' by the assertion that "the king has killed his heart") he was not in a fit condition for "a speedy appearance amongst the Merry Wives of Windsor;" and further, that if it be true, as the first act of the Second Part evinces, that Sir John, soon after doing good service at Shrewsbury, was sent off, with some charge, to Lord John of Lancaster at York, he could not consistently saunter to Windsor, after his re-encounter with the Chief Justice." Looking at these contradictions, Chalmers places "the true epoch of this comedy in 1596," and affirms "*that its proper place is before 'The First Part of Henry IV.'*" We had been strongly impressed with the same opinion before we had seen the passage in Chalmers, which is not given under his view of the chronology of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor.' But we are quite aware that the theory is at first sight open to objection: though it is clearly not so objectionable as Malone's assertion that Shakspeare revived his dead Falstaff, Quickly, Nym, and Bardolph; and it perhaps gets rid of the difficulties which belong to Dr. Johnson's opinion that "the present play ought to be read between 'Henry IV.' and 'Henry V.'"

The question, altogether, appears to us very interesting as a piece of literary history; and we therefore request the indulgence of our readers whilst we examine it somewhat in detail.

And first, of the *tradition* upon which Malone builds. Dennis, in an epistle prefixed to 'The Comical Gallant,' an alteration of this play which he published in 1702, says,—"*This comedy was written at her (Queen Elizabeth's) command, and by her direction, and she was so eager to see it acted that she commanded it to be finished in fourteen days; and was afterwards, as tradition tells us, very well pleased at the representation.*" The tradition, however, soon became more circumstantial; for Rowe, and Pope, and Theobald each inform us that Elizabeth was so well pleased *with the Falstaff of the two Parts of 'Henry IV.'* that

she commanded a play to be written by Shakspeare in which he should show the knight in love. Malone considers that the tradition, as given by Dennis, came to him from Dryden, who received it from Davenant; Rowe, Pope, and Theobald adopted a more circumstantial tradition from Gildon, who published it in his 'Remarks on Shakspeare's Plays,' in 1710. But even this authority is more vague than the usual statement. It runs thus:—"The Fairies in the fifth act make a handsome compliment to the queen, in her palace of Windsor; who had obliged him [Shakspeare] to write a play of Sir John Falstaff in love, and which I am very well assured he performed in a fortnight." The tradition, as stated by Dennis, is not inconsistent with the belief that 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' (of course we speak of the sketch) was produced *before* the two Parts of 'Henry IV.' The more circumstantial tradition is completely reconcileable only with Malone's theory, that Shakspeare, *continuing* the comic characters of the historical plays in 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' ventured upon the daring experiment of reviving the dead.

Malone, according to his theory, believes that the sketch of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' "finished in fourteen days," was written in 1601; Chalmers that it was written in 1596. We are inclined to think that the period of the production of the original sketch might have been earlier than 1596.

Raleigh returned from his expedition to Guiana in 1596, having sailed in 1595. In the present text of the 'Merry Wives' (Act I. Scene 3) Falstaff says, "Here's another letter to her: she bears the purse too; she is *a region in Guiana*, all gold and bounty. I will be cheater to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me: they shall be my East and West Indies." In the original sketch the passage stands thus:—"Here is another letter to her; she bears the purse too. They shall be exchequers to me, and I'll be cheaters to them both. They shall be my East and West Indies." In the amended text we have, subsequently,

"Sail like my pinnace to those golden shores;"

which line is found in the quarto, *the* being in the place of *those*. This line *alone* is taken by Malone to show that the comedy, in its first unfinished state, "was written after Sir Walter Raleigh's return from Guiana in 1596." Surely this is not precise enough. *Golden shores* were spoken of metaphorically before Raleigh's voyage; but the *region in Guiana* is a very different indication. To our minds it shows that the sketch was written *before* Raleigh's return;—the finished play after Guiana was known and talked of.

'The Fairy Queen' of Spenser was published in 1596. "The whole plot," says Chalmers, "which was laid by Mrs. Page, to be executed at the hour of fairy revel, around Herne's Oak, by urchins, ouphes, and fairies, green and white, was plainly an allusion to 'The Fairy Queen' of 1596, which for some time after its publication was the universal talk." A *general* mention of fairies and fairy revels might naturally occur without any allusion to Spenser; and thus in the original sketch we have only such a general mention. But in the amended copy of the folio '*The Fairy Queen*' is presented to the audience three times as a familiar name. If these passages may be taken to allude to 'The Fairy Queen' of Spenser, we have another proof (as far as such proof can go) that the original sketch, in which they do *not* occur, was written before 1596.

Again, in Falstaff's address to the Merry Wives at Herne's Oak, we have—"Let the sky rain potatoes, and snow eringoes." These portions of a sentence are in Lodge's '*Devils Incarnate*,' 1596;—but they are *not* found in the original sketch of this comedy.

Whatever may be the date of the original sketch, there can be no doubt, we think, that the play, as we have received it from the folio of 1623, was enlarged and revived after the production of 'Henry IV.' Some would assign this revival to the time of James I. The passages which indicate this, according to Malone and Chalmers, are those in which Falstaff says, "You'll complain of me to the *king*?"—the word being *council* in the quarto; "these *knights* will hack"—(see

Act II. Sc. 1); Mrs. Quickly's allusion to *coaches*; the poetical description of the insignia of the Garter; and the mention of the "*Cotsall*" games. But, as not one of these passages is found in the original quarto, the question of the date of the sketch remains untouched by them. The *exact* date is of very little importance, because we do not know the *exact* dates of the two Parts of 'Henry IV.' But, before we leave this branch of the subject, we may briefly notice a matter which is in itself curious, and hitherto unnoticed.

In the original sketch we have the following passage:—

Doctor. Where be my host de gartir?

Host. Oh, here, sir, in perplexity.

Doctor. I cannot tell vat be dad,
But be-gar I will tell you von ting.

Dere be a *Germane* duke come to de court
Has cosened all the hosts of Brainford
And Redding,"

This introduces the story of the "cozenage" of my host of the Garter, by some Germans, who pretended to be of the retinue of a German duke. Now, if we knew that a real German duke had visited Windsor (a rare occurrence in the days of Elizabeth), we should have the date of the comedy pretty exactly fixed. The circumstance would be one of those local and temporary allusions which Shakspeare seized upon to arrest the attention of his audience. In 1592 a German duke did visit Windsor. We have before us, through the kindness of a friend, a narrative, printed in the old German language, of the journey to England of the Duke of Würtemberg, in 1592, which narrative, drawn up by his secretary, contains a daily journal of his proceedings. He was accompanied by a considerable retinue, and travelled under the name of "the Count Mombeliard."

This curious volume contains a sort of passport from Lord Howard, addressed to all Justices of Peace, Mayors, and Bailiffs, which we give without correction of the orthography:—

"Theras this nobleman, Counte Mombeliard, is to passe ouer Contrye in England, into the lowe Countrys, Thise schal be to wil

and command you in heer Majte. name for such, and is heer pleasure to see him furnished with post horses in his trauail to the sea side, and ther to soecke up such schippinge as schalbe fit for his transportations, *he pay nothing for the same*, for wich tis schal be your sufficient warrante soo see that your faile noth thereof at your perilles. From Bifleete, the 2 uf September, 1592. Your friend, C. HOWARD."

"The "German duke" visited Windsor; was shown "the splendidly beautiful and royal castle;" hunted in the "parks full of fallow-deer and other game;" heard the music of an organ, and of other instruments, with the voices of little boys, as well as a sermon an hour long, in a church covered with lead; and, after staying some days, departed for Hampton Court. His grace and his suite must have caused a sensation at Windsor. Probably mine host of the Garter had really made "grand preparation for a Duke de Jarmany;"—at any rate he would believe Bardolph's story,—"the Germans desire to have three of your horses." Was there any dispute about the ultimate payment for the duke's horses for which *he* was "to pay nothing?" Was my host out of his reckoning when he said, "They shall have my horses, but I'll make them pay?" Sir Hugh, who has a spite against mine host, thus tells him the ill news. "Where is mine Host of the Garter? Now, mine Host, I would desire you to have a care of your entertainments, for there is three sorts of *cosen garmomble*s is cosen all the Host of Maidenhead and Readings." We have no doubt whatever that the author of the 'Merry Wives of Windsor' literally rendered the tale of mine host's perplexity for the amusement of the Court. For who was the German Duke who visited Windsor in the autumn of 1592? "His Serene Highness the Right Honourable Prince and Lord, Frederick Duke of Würtemberg and Teck, *Count of Mümpelgart*." The passport of Lord Howard describes him as Count Mombeliard. And who are those who have rid away with the horses? "Three sorts of *cosen garmomble*s." One device of the poets of that day for masking a real name under a fictitious

was to invert the order of the syllables: thus, in the 'Shepherd's Calendar,' Algrind stands for Archbishop Grindal, and Morel for Elmor, Bishop of London. In Lodge's 'Fig for Momus,' we also find Denroy for Matthew Royden, and Ringde for Dering. Precisely according to this method, *Garmomble* is *Momblegar*—Mumpelgart. We think this is decisive as to the allusion; and that the allusion is decisive as to the date of the play. What would be a good joke when the Court was at Windsor in 1593, with the visit of the Duke fresh in the memory of the courtiers, would lose its point at a later period.

We now proceed to the more interesting question—was 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' produced, either *after* 'The First Part of Henry IV.,' *after* the 'Second Part,' *after* 'Henry V.,' or *before* all of these historical plays? Let us first state the difficulties which inseparably belong to the *circumstances* under which the similar characters of the historical plays and the comedy are found, if the comedy is to be received as a *continuation* of the historical plays.

The Falstaff of the two Parts of 'Henry IV.,' who dies in 'Henry V.,' but who, according to Malone, comes alive again in 'The Merry Wives,' is found at Windsor living lavishly at the Garter Inn, sitting "at ten pounds a week,"—with Bardolph, and Nym, and Pistol, and the Page, his "followers." At what point of his previous life is Falstaff in this flourishing condition? At Windsor he is represented as having committed an outrage upon one Justice Shallow. Could this outrage have been perpetrated after the borrowing of the "thousand pound," which was unpaid at the time of Henry the Fifth's coronation; or did it take place before Falstaff and Shallow renewed their youthful acquaintance under the auspices of Justice Silence? Johnson says, "This play should be read between 'King Henry IV.' and 'King Henry V.," that is, after Falstaff's renewed intercourse with Shallow, the borrowing of the thousand pounds, and the failure of his schemes at the coronation. Another writer says, "It ought rather to be read between the First and Second Part of

'King Henry IV.'—that is, before Falstaff had met Shallow at his seat in Gloucestershire, at which meeting Shallow recollects nothing that had taken place at Windsor, and had clean forgotten the outrages of Falstaff upon his keeper, his dogs, and his deer. But Falstaff had been surrounded by much more important circumstances than had belonged to his acquaintance with Master Shallow. He had been the intimate of a Prince—he had held high charge in the royal army. We learn indeed that he is a "soldier" when he addresses Mrs. Ford; but he entirely abstains from any of those allusions to his royal friend which might have been supposed to be acceptable to a Merry Wife of Windsor. In the folio copy of the amended play we have, positively, not one allusion to his connection with the court. In the quarto there is one solitary passage, which would apply to any court—to that of Elizabeth, as well as to that of Henry V.—"Well, if the fine wits of the court hear this, they'll so whip me with their keen jests that they'll melt me out like tallow." In the same quarto, when Falstaff hears the noise of hunters at Herne's Oak, he exclaims, "I'll lay my life the mad Prince of Wales is stealing his father's deer." This points apparently at the Prince of 'Henry IV.:' but we think it had reference to the Prince of the 'Famous Victories,'—a character with whom Shakspeare's audience was familiar. The passage is left out in the amended play; but we find another passage which certainly is meant for a link, however slight, between 'The Merry Wives' and 'Henry IV.:' Page objects to Fenton that "he kept company with the wild Prince and with Pointz." The corresponding passage in the quarto is "the gentleman is wild—he knows too much."

What does Shallow do at Windsor—he who inquired "how a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?"—Robert Shallow, of Glostershire, "a poor esquire of this county, and one of the king's justices of the peace?" It is true that we are told by Slender that he was "in the county of Gloster, justice of peace, and *coram*,"—but this information is first given us in the amended edition. In

the sketch, *Master Shallow* (we do not find even his name of Robert) is indeed a "cavalero justice," according to our Host of the Garter, but his commission may be in Berkshire for aught that the poet tells us to the contrary. Slender, indeed, is "as good as is any in Glostershire, under the degree of a squire," and he is Shallow's cousin;—but of Shallow "the local habitation" is undefined enough to make us believe that he might have been a son, or indeed a father (for he says, "I am fourscore") of the real Justice Shallow. Again:—In 'Henry IV., Part I.,' we have a *Hostess* without a name,—the "good pint-pot" who is exhorted by Falstaff "love thy husband;"—in 'Henry IV., Part II.,' we have *Hostess Quickly*,—"a poor widow," according to the Chief Justice, to whom Falstaff owes himself and his money too;—in 'Henry V.,' this good *Hostess* is "*the quondam Quickly*," who has married Pistol, and who, if the received opinion be correct, died before her husband returned from the wars of Henry V. Where shall we place the *Mistress Quickly*, than whom "never a woman in Windsor knows more of Anne's mind,"—and who defies all angels "but in the way of honesty?"—She has evidently had no previous passages with Sir John Falstaff;—she is "a foolish carrion" only,—Dr. Caius's nurse, or his dry nurse, or his cook, or his laundry;—she has not heard Falstaff declaim, "as like one of these harlotry players as I ever see;"—she has not sate with him by a sea-coal fire, when goodwife Keech, the butcher's wife, came in and called her "gossip Quickly;"—she did not see him "fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends," when "there was but one way." Falstaff and Quickly are strangers. She is to him either "goodwife" or "good maid,"—and at any rate only "fair woman." Surely, we cannot place *Mistress Quickly* of 'The Merry Wives' after 'Henry V.,' when she was dead; or after 'The Second Part of Henry IV.,' when she was a "poor widow;" or before 'The Second Part,' when she had a husband and children. She must stand alone in 'The Merry Wives,'—an undefined predecessor of the famous *Quickly* of the Boar's Head.

But Pistol and Bardolph—are they not the same “irregular humourists” (as they are called in the original list of characters to ‘The Second Part of Henry IV.’) acting with Falstaff under the same circumstances? We think not. The Pistol of ‘The Merry Wives’ is not the “ancient” Pistol of ‘The Second Part of Henry IV.’ and of ‘Henry V.’ nor is Bardolph the “corporal” Bardolph of ‘The Second Part of Henry IV.’ nor the “lieutenant” Bardolph of ‘Henry V.’ In the title-page, indeed, of the sketch, published as we believe without authority as a substitute for the more complete play, we have “the swaggering vaine (vein) of *ancient* Pistoll and corporal *Nym*.” Corporal Nym is no companion of Falstaff in the historical plays, for he first makes his appearance in the ‘Henry V.’ Neither Pistol, nor Bardolph, nor Nym, appear in ‘The Merry Wives’ to be soldiers serving under Falstaff. They are his “cogging companions” of the first sketch; they are his “coney-catching rascals” of the amended play;—in both they are his “followers,” whom he can turn away, discard, cashier; but Falstaff is not their “captain.”

It certainly does appear to us that these anomalous positions in which the characters common to ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’ and the ‘Henry IV.’ and ‘Henry V.’ are placed, furnish a very strong presumption that the comedy was *not a continuation* of the histories. That ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’ was a continuation of ‘Henry V.’ appears to us impossible. Malone does not think it very clear that ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’ “was written after ‘King Henry V.’ Nym and Bardolph are both *hanged* in ‘King Henry V.’ yet appear in ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor.’ Falstaff is disgraced in ‘The Second Part of King Henry IV.’ and *dies* in ‘King Henry V.’; but in ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’ he talks as if he were yet in favour at court.” Assuredly these are very natural objections to the theory that the comedy was written after ‘Henry V.’; but Malone disposes of the difficulty by the summary process of *revival*. Did ever any the most bungling writer of imagination proceed upon such a principle as is here imputed to the most skilful of dramatists?—

Would any audience ever endure such a violence to their habitual modes of thought? Would the readers of ‘The Spectator’ have tolerated the revival of Sir Roger de Coverley in ‘The Guardian?’ Could the mother of the Mary of Avenel of ‘The Monastery’ be found alive in ‘The Abbot,’ except through the agency of the White Lady? The conception is much too monstrous.

Every person who has written on the *character* of Falstaff admits the inferiority of the *butt* of ‘The Merry Wives of Windsor’ to the *wit* of the Boar’s Head. It is remarkable that in Morgann’s very elaborate ‘Essay on the Character of Falstaff’ not one of his characteristics is derived from the comedy. It has been regretted, by more than one critic, that Shakspeare should have carried on the disgrace of Falstaff in the conclusion of ‘Henry IV.’ to the further humiliation of the scenes at Datchet Mead and Herne’s Oak; and, what is worse, that Shakspeare should in the comedy have exaggerated the vices of Falstaff, and brought him down from his intellectual eminence. Shakspeare found somewhat similar incidents to the adventures of Falstaff with Mrs. Ford in a ‘Story of the Two Lovers of Pisa,’ published in Tarleton’s ‘Newes out of Purgatorie,’ 1590. In that story an intrigue is carried on, with no innocent intentions on the part of the lady, with a young man who makes the old husband his confidant, as Falstaff makes Brook, and whose escapes in chests and up chimneys may have suggested the higher comedy of the buckbasket and the wise woman of Brentford. The story is given at length in Malone’s edition of our poet. But Shakspeare desired to show a butt and a dupe—not a successful gallant; a husband jealous without cause—not an unhappy old man plotting against his betrayers. He gave the whole affair a ludicrous turn. He made the lover old, and fat, and avaricious;—betrayed by his own greediness and vanity into the most humiliating scrapes, so that his complete degradation was the natural dénouement of the whole adventure, and the progress of his shame the proper source of merriment. Could the adroit and witty Falstaff of ‘Henry IV.’ have been selected by Shakspeare

for such an exhibition? In truth the Falstaff of 'The Merry Wives,' *especially as we have him in the first sketch*, is not at all adroit, and not very witty. Read the very first scene in which Falstaff appears in this comedy. To Shallow's reproaches he opposes no weapon but impudence, and that not of the sublime kind which so astounds us in the 'Henry IV.' Read further the scene in which he discloses his views upon the Merry Wives to Pistol and Nym. Here Pistol is the wit:—

"*Fal.* My honest lads, I will tell you what I am about.

Pist. Two yards and more.

Fal. No quips now, Pistol."

Again, in the same scene:—

"*Fal.* Sometimes the beam of her view gilded my foot, sometimes my portly belly.

Pist. Then did the sun on dunghill shine."

There can be no doubt, however, that, when the comedy was remodelled, which certainly was done after the production of 'Henry IV.,' the character of Falstaff was much heightened. But still the poet kept him far behind the Falstaff of 'Henry IV.' Falstaff's descriptions, first to Bardolph and then to Brook, of his buckbasket adventure, are amongst the best things in the comedy, and they are very slightly altered from the original sketch. But compare them with any of the racy passages of the Falstaff of the Boar's Head, and after the comparison we feel ourselves in the presence of a being of far lower powers of intellect than the Falstaff "unimitated, unimitable." Is this acknowledged inferiority of the Falstaff of 'The Merry Wives' most easily reconciled with the theory that he was produced before or after the Falstaff of the 'Henry IV.?' That Elizabeth might have suggested 'The Merry Wives,' originally, upon some traditionary tale of Windsor—that it might have been acted in the gallery which she built at Windsor, and which still bears her name—we can understand; but we cannot reconcile the belief that Shakspeare produced the Falstaff of 'The Merry Wives' after the Falstaff of 'Henry IV.' with our unbounded confidence in the habitual power of such a poet. To him Falstaff was a thing of reality. He had drawn a man altogether

different from other men, but altogether in nature. Could he much lower the character of that man? Another and a feebler dramatist might have given us the Falstaff of 'The Merry Wives' as an imitation of the Falstaff of 'Henry IV.;' but Shakspeare *must* have abided by the *one* Falstaff that he had made after such a wondrous fashion of truth and originality.

And then Justice Shallow—never to be forgotten Justice Shallow!—The Shallow who will bring Falstaff "before the council" is not the Shallow who with him "heard the chimes at midnight." The Shallow of the sketch of 'The Merry Wives' has not even Shallow's trick of repetition. In the amended Play this characteristic may be recognised; but in the sketch there is not a trace of it. For example, in the first scene of the finished play we find Shallow talking somewhat like the great Shallow, especially about the fallow greyhound; in the sketch this passage is altogether wanting. In the sketch he says to Page, "Though he be a knight, he shall not think to carry it so away. Master Page, I will not be wronged." In the finished play we have, "He hath wronged me; indeed, he hath; at a word he hath: believe me; Robert Shallow, esquire, saith he is wronged." And Bardolph too! Could it be predicated that the Bardolph of a comedy which was produced after the 'Henry IV.' would want those "meteors and exhalations" which characterize the Bardolph who was a standing joke to Falstaff and the Prince? Would his zeal cease to "burn in his nose?" Absolutely, in the first sketch, there is not the slightest allusion to that face which ever "blushed extempore." One mention, indeed, there is in the complete play of the "red face," and one supposed allusion of "Scarlet and John." The commentators have wished to show that Bardolph in both copies is called "a tinder-box" on account of his nose; but this is not very clear. And then Pistol is not the magnificent bully of 'The Second Part of Henry IV.,' and of 'Henry V.' He has "affectations," as Sir Hugh mentions, and speaks "in Latin," as Slender has it;—but he is here literally "a tame cheater," but not without considerable cleverness.

"Why, then the world's mine oyster" is essentially higher than the obscure bombast of the real Pistol. Of Mistress Quickly we have already spoken as to the circumstances in which she is placed; and these circumstances are so essentially different that we can scarcely recognise any marked similarity of character in the original sketch.

Having, then, seen the great and insuperable difficulties which belong to the theory that 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' was written *after* the histories, let us consider what difficulties, both of situation and character, present themselves under the other theory, that the comedy was produced *before* the histories.

First, is it irreconcilable with the tradition referring to Queen Elizabeth? It is not so, if we adopt the tradition as related by Dennis—this comedy was written by Queen Elizabeth's command, and finished in fourteen days. This statement of the matter is plain and simple; because it is disembarrassed of those explanations and inferences which never belong to any popular tradition, but are superadded by ingenious persons who have a theory to establish. We can perfectly understand how 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' as we have it in the first sketch, might have been produced by Shakspeare in a fortnight;—and how such a slight and lively piece, containing many local allusions, and perhaps some delineations of real characters, might have furnished the greatest solace to Elizabeth some seven or eight years before the end of the sixteenth century, after mornings busily employed in talking politics with Leicester, or in translating Boetius in her own private chamber. The manners throughout, and without any disguise, are those of Elizabeth's own time. Leave out the line in the amended play of "the mad Prince and Poins,"—and the line in the sketch about "the wild Prince killing his father's deer,"—and the whole play (taken apart from the histories) might with much greater propriety be acted with the costume of the age of Elizabeth. It is for this reason, most probably, that we find so little of pure poetry either in the sketch or the finished performance. As Shakspeare placed his characters in his own country,

with the manners of his own days, he made them speak like ordinary human beings, showing

"—deeds and language such as men do use,
And persons such as Comedy would choose,
When she would show an image of the times,
And sport with human follies, not with crimes."*

We may believe, therefore, the tradition (without adopting the circumstances which make it difficult of belief), and accept the theory that 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' was written before the 'Henry IV.'

Secondly, is the theory that the comedy was produced *before* the histories, irreconcilable with the *contradictory circumstances* which render the other theory so difficult of admission? Assuming that the comedy was written before the histories, it can be read without any violence to our indelible recollections of the situations of the characters in the 'Henry IV.' and 'Henry V.' It must be read with a conviction that, if there be any connection of the action at all, it is a very slight one—and that this action precedes the 'Henry IV.' by some indefinite period. Then, the Falstaff who in the quiet shades of Windsor did begin to perceive he was "made an ass" had not acquired the experience of the city, for before he knew Hal he "knew nothing;"—then the fair maid Quickly, who afterwards contrived to have a husband and be a poor widow without changing her name, knew no higher sphere than the charge of Dr. Caius's laundry and kitchen;—then Pistol was not an ancient, certainly had not married the quondam Quickly, had not made the dangerous experiment of jesting with Fluellen, and occasionally talked like a reasonable being;—then Shallow had some unexplained business which took him from Glostershire to Windsor, travelled without his man Davy, had not lent a thousand pounds to Sir John Falstaff, and was not quite so silly and so delightful as when he had drunk "too much sack at supper" toasting "all the cavaleroes about London;"—then, lastly, Bardolph was not "master corporate Bardolph," and certainly Nym and he had not been hanged.

* Ben Jonson, Prologue to 'Every Man in his Humour.'

Thirdly, does the theory of the production of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' before 'Henry IV.' and 'Henry V.' furnish a proper solution of the remarkable inferiority in the comedy of several of the characters which are common to both? If we accept the opinion that the Falstaff, the Shallow, the Quickly, the Pistol, Bardolph, and Nym, of 'The Merry Wives,' were all originally conceived by the poet before the characters with similar names in the 'Henry IV.' and 'Henry V. ;' and that, after they had been in some degree adopted in the historical plays, Shakspeare remodelled 'The Merry Wives,' and heightened the resemblances of character which the resemblances of name implied,—the inferiority in several of these characters, especially in the sketch, will be accounted for, without assuming, with Johnson, that "the poet approached as near as he could to the work enjoined him; yet, having perhaps in the former play completed his own idea, seems not to have been able to give Falstaff all his former powers of entertainment." Johnson's opinion proceeds upon the very just assumption that *continuations* are, for the most part, inferior to original conceptions. But 'The Merry Wives' could not have been proposed as a continuation of the 'Henry IV.' and the 'Henry V.,' even if it had been written after those plays. If it were written after the histories, the author certainly mystified all the new circumstances as compared with those which had preceded them, for the purpose of destroying the idea of continuation. This appears to us too violent an assumption. But no other can be maintained. To attribute such interminable contradictions to negligence is to assume that Shakspeare was not only the greatest of poets, but of blunderers.

And now we must hazard a conjecture. It has been attempted to show that the Falstaff of the 'First Part of Henry IV.' was originally called *Oldcastle**. If that were the case, and the balance of evidence is in favour of that opinion, the whole matter seems to us clearer. Let it be remembered that Falstaff and Bardolph are the only characters that are

* See Notice of 'Sir John Oldcastle,' a play by some attributed to Shakspeare, Book VI. chap. 2.

common to the 'First Part of Henry IV.' and 'The Merry Wives of Windsor;' for in the original copy of 'Henry IV., Part I.,' the person who stands amongst the modern list of characters as Quickly is invariably called *the Hostess*. If the Falstaff, then, of 'Henry IV.' were originally *Oldcastle*, we have only Bardolph left in common to the two dramas. Was Bardolph originally called so in 'Henry IV., Part I.'? When Poins proposes to the Prince to go to Gadshill, he says, in the original copy, "I have a jest to execute that I cannot manage alone,—Falstaff, Harvey, Rossil, and Gadshill shall rob these men," &c. We now read, "Falstaff, Bardolph, Peto, and Gadshill," &c. It has been conjectured that Harvey and Rossil were the names of actors; but, as *Oldcastle* remains where we now read Falstaff in one place of the original copy, might not in the same way Bardolph have been originally *Harvey* or *Rossil*? This point, however, is not material. If Shakspeare were compelled, by a strong expression of public opinion, to remove the name of *Oldcastle* from the 'First Part of Henry IV.,' the name of *Falstaff* was ready to his hand as a substitute. He had drawn a *knight, fat and unscrupulous*, as he had represented *Oldcastle*, but far his inferior in wit, humour, inexhaustible merriment, presence of mind, and intellectual activity. The transition was not inconsistent from the Falstaff of 'The Merry Wives' to the Falstaff of 'Henry IV.' The character, when Shakspeare remodelled the first sketch of the comedy, required some elevation;—but it still might stand at a long distance, without offence to an audience who knew that the inferior creation was first produced. With Falstaff Shakspeare might have transferred Bardolph to the 'First Part of Henry IV.,' but materially altered. The base Hungarian wight who would "the spigot wield" had, as a tapster, made his nose a "fiery kitchen" to roast malt-worms; and he was fit to save him "a thousand marks in links and torches." When, further, Falstaff had completely superseded *Oldcastle* in the 'First Part of Henry IV.,' Shakspeare might have adopted Pistol, and Shallow, and Quickly in the Second Part,—but greatly changed;—and, lastly, have introduced Nym to the

'Henry V.' unchanged. All this being accomplished, he would naturally have remodelled the first sketch of 'The Merry Wives,'—making the relations between the characters of the comedy and of the histories closer, but still of purpose keeping the situations sufficiently distinct. He thus for ever connected 'The Merry Wives' with the historical plays. The Falstaff of the comedy must now belong to the age of Henry IV.; but to be understood he must, we venture to think, be regarded as the embryo Falstaff.

We request that it may be borne in mind that the entire argument which we have thus advanced is founded upon a conviction that the original sketch, as published in the quarto of 1602, is an authentic production of our poet. Had no such sketch existed, we must have reconciled the difficulties of believing 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' to have been produced *after* 'Henry IV.' and 'Henry V.' as we best might have done. Then we must have acknowledged that the characters of Falstaff and Shallow and Quickly were the same in the comedy and the 'Henry IV.,' though represented *under different circumstances*. Then we must have believed that the contradictory situations were to be explained by the determination of Shakspeare boldly to disregard the circumstances which resulted from his compliance with the commands of Elizabeth—"to show Falstaff in love." But that sketch being preserved to us, it is much easier, we think, to believe that it was produced before the histories; and that the characters were subsequently heightened, and more strikingly delineated, to assimilate them to the characters of the histories. After all, we have endeavoured, whilst we have expressed our own belief, fairly to present both sides of the question. The point, we think, is of interest to the lovers of Shakspeare; for, inferring that the comedy is a continuation of the history, the inferiority of the Falstaff of 'The Merry Wives' to the Falstaff of 'Henry IV.' implies a considerable abatement of the poet's skill. On the other hand, the conviction that the sketch of the comedy preceded the history, that it was an early play, and that it was subsequently remodelled, is consistent with

the belief in the progression of that extraordinary intellect, which acquired greater vigour the more its power was exercised.

Rightly to appreciate this comedy, it is, we conceive, absolutely necessary to dissociate it from the historical plays of 'Henry IV.' and 'Henry V.' Whether Shakspeare produced the original sketch of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' before those plays, and remodelled it after their appearance,—or whether he produced both the original sketch and the finished performance when his audiences were perfectly familiar with the Falstaff, Shallow, Pistol, Nym, Bardolph, and Mistress Quickly of 'Henry IV.' and 'Henry V.'—it is perfectly certain that *he* did not intend 'The Merry Wives' as a continuation. It is impossible, however, not to associate the period of the comedy with the period of the histories. For although the characters which are common to all the dramas act in the comedy under very different circumstances, and are, to our minds, not only different in their moods but in some of their distinctive features, they must each be received as identical—*alter et idem*. Still the connexion must be as far as possible removed from our view, that we may avoid comparisons which the author certainly was desirous to avoid, when in remodelling the comedy he introduced no circumstances which could connect it with the histories; and when he not only did not reject what would be called the anachronisms of the first sketch, but in the perfect play heaped on such anachronisms with a profuseness that is not exhibited in any other of his dramas. We must, therefore, not only dissociate the characters of 'The Merry Wives' from the similar characters of the histories, but suffer our minds to slide into the belief that the manners of the times of Henry IV. had sufficient points in common with those of the times of Elizabeth to justify the poet in taking no great pains to distinguish between them. We must suffer ourselves to be carried away with the nature and fun of this comedy, without encumbering our minds with any precise idea of the social circumstances under which the characters lived. We must not startle, therefore, at the mention of Star-chambers, and Edward shovel-boards,

and Sackerson, and Guiana, and rapiers, and Flemish drunkards, and coaches, and pensioners. The characters speak in the language of truth and nature, which belongs to all time; and we must forget that they sometimes use the expressions of a particular time to which they do not in strict propriety belong.

The critics have been singularly laudatory of this comedy. Warton calls it "the most complete specimen of Shakspeare's comic powers." Johnson says, "This comedy is remarkable for the variety and number of the personages, who exhibit more characters appropriated and discriminated than perhaps can be found in any other play. . . . Its general power, that power by which all works of genius shall finally be tried, is such, that perhaps it never yet had reader or spectator who did not think it too soon at the end." We agree with much of this; but we certainly cannot agree with Warton that it is "the most complete specimen of Shakspeare's comic powers." We cannot forget 'As You Like It,' and 'Twelfth Night,' and 'Much Ado about Nothing.' We cannot forget those exquisite combinations of the highest wit with the purest poetry, in which the wit flows from the same everlasting fountain as the poetry, —both revealing all that is most intense and profound and beautiful and graceful in humanity. Of those qualities which put Shakspeare above all other men that ever existed, 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' exhibits few traces. Some of the touches, however, which no other hand could give, are to be found in Slender, and we think in Quickly. Slender, little as he has to do, is the character that most frequently floats before our fancy when we think of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor.' Slender and Anne Page are the favourites of our modern school of English painting, which has attempted, and successfully, to carry the truth of the Dutch school into a more refined region of domestic art. We do not wish Anne Page to have been married to Slender, but in their poetical alliance they are inseparable. It is in the remodelled play that we find, for the most part, such Shakspearean passages in the character of Slender as, "If I be drunk, I'll be drunk

with those that have the fear of God, and not with drunken knaves," —which resolve, as Evans says, shows his "virtuous mind." In the remodelled play, too, we find the most peculiar traces of the master-hand in Quickly, —such as, "His worst fault is that he is given to prayer; he is something peevish that way;" and "The boy never need to understand anything, for 't is not good that children should know any wickedness. Old folks, you know, have discretion, as they say, and know the world;" and again, "Good hearts, what ado here is to bring you together! Sure, one of you does not serve heaven well that you are so crossed." Johnson objects to this latter passage as profane; but he overlooks the extraordinary depth of the satire. Shakspeare's profound knowledge of the human heart is as much displayed in these three little sentences as in his Hamlet and his Iago.

The principal action of this comedy—the adventures of Falstaff with the Merry Wives—sweeps on with a rapidity of movement which hurries us forward to the dénouement as irresistibly as if the actors were under the influence of that destiny which belongs to the empire of tragedy. No reverses, no disgraces, can save Falstaff from his final humiliation. The net is around him, but he does not see the meshes;—he fancies himself the deceiver, but he is the deceived. He will stare Ford "out of his wits," he will "awe him with his cudgel," yet he lives "to be carried in a basket, like a barrow of butcher's offal; and to be thrown in the Thames." But his confidence is undaunted: "I will be thrown into Etna, as I have been thrown into Thames, ere I will leave her;" yet, "since I plucked geese, played truant, and whipped top, I knew not what it was to be beaten, till lately." Lastly, he will rush upon a third adventure: "This is the third time; I hope good luck lies in odd numbers;" yet his good luck ends in "I do begin to perceive that I am made an ass." The real jealousy of Ford most skilfully helps on the merry devices of his wife; and with equal skill does the poet make him throw away his jealousy, and assist in the last plot against the "unclean knight." The misadventures of Falstaff are

most agreeably varied. The disguise of the old woman of Brentford puts him altogether in a different situation to his suffocation in the buck-basket; and the fairy machinery of Herne's Oak carries the catastrophe out of the region of comedy into that of romance.

The movement of the principal action is beautifully contrasted with the occasional repose of the other scenes. The Windsor of the time of Elizabeth is presented to us, as the quiet country town, sleeping under the shadow of its neighbour the castle. Amidst its gabled houses, separated by pretty gardens, from which the elm and the chestnut and the lime throw their branches across the unpaved road, we find a goodly company, with little to do but gossip and laugh, and make sport out of each other's cholers and weaknesses. We see Master Page training his "fallow greyhound:" and we go with Master Ford "a-birding." We listen to the "pribbles and prabbles" of Sir Hugh Evans and Justice Shallow, with a quiet satisfaction: for they talk as unartificial men ordinarily talk, without much wisdom, but with good temper and sincerity. We find ourselves in the days of ancient hospitality, when men could make their fellows welcome without ostentatious display, and half a dozen neighbours "could drink down all unkindness" over "a hot venison pasty." The more busy inhabitants of the town have time to tattle, and to laugh, and be laughed at. Mine Host of the Garter is the prince of hosts; he is the very soul of fun and good temper:—he is not solicitous whether Falstaff sit "at ten pounds a week" or at two;—he readily takes "the withered servingman for a fresh tapster;"—his confidence in his own cleverness is delicious:—"Am I politic? am I subtle? am I a Machiavel?"—the Germans "shall have my horses, but I'll

make them pay, I'll sauce them." When he loses his horses, and his "mind is heavy," we rejoice that Fenton will give him "a hundred pound in gold" more than his loss. His contrivances to manage the fray between the furious French doctor and the honest Welsh parson are productive of the happiest situations. Caius waiting for his adversary—"De herring is no dead so as I vill kill him"—is capital. But Sir Hugh, with his—

"There will we make our peds of roses,
And a thousand fragrant posies,
To shallow—

Mercy on me! I have a great dispositions to cry,"—is inimitable.

With regard to the underplot of Fenton and Anne Page—the scheme of Page to marry her to Slender—the counterplot of her mother, "firm for Dr. Caius"—and the management of the lovers to obtain a triumph out of the devices against them—it may be sufficient to point out how skilfully it is interwoven with the Herne's Oak adventure of Falstaff. Though Slender "went to her in white, and cried 'mum,' and she cried 'budget,' . . . yet it was not Anne, but a postmaster's boy;"—though Caius did "take her in green," he "ha' married un *garçon*, a boy, un *paisan*;"—but Anne and Fenton,—

"long since contracted,
Are now so sure, that nothing can dissolve
them."

Over all the misadventures of that night, when "all sorts of deer were chas'd," Shakspeare throws his own tolerant spirit of forgiveness and content:—

"Good husband, let us every one go home,
And laugh this sport o'er by a country fire;
Sir John and all."

BOOK VI.

CHAPTER I.

THE DRAMATISTS OF SHAKSPERE'S SECOND PERIOD.

"MANY were the wit-combats betwixt him and BEN JONSON; which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war: Master Jonson (like the former) was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow, in his performances. Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention." Such is Thomas Fuller's well-known description of the convivial intercourse of Shakspeare and Jonson, first published in 1662. A biographer of Shakspeare says, "The memory of Fuller perhaps teemed with their sallies." That memory, then, must have been furnished at secondhand; for Fuller was not born till 1608. He beheld them in his mind's eye only. Imperfect, and in many respects worthless, as the few traditions of these wit-combats are, there can be no doubt of the companionship and ardent friendship of these two monarchs of the stage. Fuller's fanciful comparison of their respective conversational powers is probably to some extent a just one. The difference in the constitution of their minds, and the diversity of their respective acquirements, would more endear each to the other's society.

Rowe thus describes the commencement of the intercourse between Shakspeare and Jonson:—"His acquaintance with Ben Jonson began with a remarkable piece of humanity and good nature. Mr. Jonson, who was at that time altogether unknown to the world, had offered one of his plays to the players, in order to have it acted; and the persons into whose hands it was put, after

having turned it carelessly and superciliously over, were just upon returning it to him with an ill-natured answer, that it would be of no service to their company, when Shakspeare luckily cast his eye upon it, and found something so well in it as to engage him first to read it through, and afterwards to recommend Mr. Jonson and his writings to the public."* The tradition which Rowe thus records is not supported by minute facts which have since become known. In Henslowe's Diary of plays performed at his theatre, we have an entry under the date of the 11th of May, 1597, of 'The Comedy of Humours.' This was no doubt a new play, for it was acted eleven times: and there can be little question that it was Jonson's comedy of 'Every Man in his Humour.' A few months after we have the following entry in the same document:—"Lent unto Benjamin Jonson, player, the 22nd of July, 1597, in ready money, the sum of four pounds, to be paid it again whensoever either I or my son shall demand it." Again: "Lent unto Benjamin Jonson, the 3rd of December, 1597, upon a book which he was to write for us before Christmas next after the date hereof, which he showed the plot unto the company: I say, lent in ready money unto him the sum of twenty shillings." On the 5th of January, 1598, Henslowe records in the same way the trifling loan of five shillings. An advance is also made by Henslowe to his company on the 13th of August, 1598, "to buy a book called 'Hot Anger soon cold,' of Mr. Porter, Mr. Chettle, and Benjamin Jonson, in full payment, the sum of six pounds." We thus see, that in 1597

* 'Life of Shakspeare.'

and 1598 there was an intimate connection of Jonson with the stage, but not with Shakspeare's company. It can scarcely be supposed that Jonson was a writer for the stage earlier than 1597, and that the "remarkable piece of humanity and good nature" recorded of Shakspeare took place before the connection of Jonson with Henslowe's theatre. He was born, according to Gifford, in 1574. In January, 1619, he sent a poetical "picture of himself" to Drummond, in which these lines occur:—

"My hundred of grey hairs
Told six and forty years."

This would place his birth in 1573*. Drummond, in narrating Jonson's account of "his own life, education, birth, actions," up to the period in which we have shown how dependent he was upon the advances of a theatrical manager, thus writes:—"His grandfather came from Carlisle, and, he thought, from Annandale to it: he served King Henry VIII., and was a gentleman. His father lost all his estate under Queen Mary, having been cast in prison and forfeited; at last turned minister: so he was a minister's son. He himself was posthumous born, a month after his father's decease; brought up poorly, put to school by a friend (his master Camden); after, taken from it, and put to another craft (I think was to be a wright or bricklayer), which he could not endure; then went he to the Low Countries; but returning soon, he betook himself to his wonted studies. In his service in the Low Countries, he had, in the face of both the camps, killed an enemy and taken *opima spolia* from him; and since his coming to England, being appealed to the fields, he had killed his adversary which had hurt him in the arm, and whose sword was ten inches longer than his; for the which he was imprisoned, and almost at the gallows. Then took he his religion by trust, of a priest who visited him in prison. Thereafter he was twelve years a Papist." Aubrey says in his random way, "He killed Mr. Marlowe the poet on Bunhill, coming from the Green

Curtain Playhouse." We know where Marlowe was killed, and when he was killed. He was slain at Deptford in 1593. Gifford supposes that this tragical event in Jonson's life took place in 1595; but the conjecture is set aside by an indisputable account of the fact. Philip Henslowe, writing to his son-in-law Alleyn on the 26th of September, 1598, says, "Since you were with me I have lost one of my company, which hurteth me greatly, that is Gabrell [Gabriel], for he is slain in Hogsden Fields by the hands of Benjamin Jonson, bricklayer; therefore I would fain have a little of your counsel, if I could."* This event took place then, we see, exactly at the period when Jonson was in constant intercourse with Henslowe's company; and it probably arose out of some quarrel at the theatre that he was "appealed to the fields." The expression of Henslowe, "Benjamin Jonson, bricklayer," is a remarkable one. It is inconsistent with Jonson's own declaration that after his return from the Low Countries he "betook himself to his wonted studies." We believe that Henslowe, under the excitement of that loss for which he required the counsel of Alleyn, used it as a term of opprobrium, that was familiar to his company. Dekker, who was a writer for Henslowe's theatre, and who in 1599 was associated with Jonson in the composition of two plays, ridicules his former friend and colleague, in 1602, as a "poor lime and hair rascal"—as one who ambled "in a leather pilch by a play-waggon in the highway"—"a foul-fisted mortar-treader"—"one famous for killing a player"—one whose face "looks for all the world like a rotten russet-apple when it is bruised"—whose "goodly and glorious nose was blunt, blunt, blunt"—who is asked, "how chance it passeth that you bid good bye to an honest trade of building chimneys and laying down bricks for a worse handicraftness?"—who is twitted with "dost stamp, mad Tamburlaine, dost stamp; thou think'st thou'st mortar under thy feet, dost?"—one whose face was "punched full of eyelet-holes like the cover of a warming-pan"—"a hollow-cheeked

* See 'Jonson's Conversations with Drummond,' published by the Shakespeare Society.

* Letter in Dulwich College, quoted in Collier's 'Memoirs of Alleyn.'

scrag." It is evident from all this abuse, which we transcribe as the passages occur in Dekker's 'Satiro-Mastix,' that the poverty, the personal appearance, and, above all, the original occupation of Jonson, exposed him to the vulgar ridicule of some of those with whom he was brought into contact at the theatre. They did not feel as honest old Fuller felt, when, describing Jonson, being in want of maintenance, as "fain to return to the trade of his father-in-law," the old chronicler of the Worthies says—"Let not them blush that have, but those who have not, a lawful calling." We can understand what Henslowe means when he says "Benjamin Jonson, bricklayer." In the autumn of 1598 the bricklayer-poet was lying in prison. At the Christmas of that year 'Every Man in his Humour,' greatly altered from the original sketch produced by Henslowe's company, was brought out by the Lord Chamberlain's company at the Blackfriars. The doors of Henslowe's theatre on the Bankside were probably shut against the man who had killed Gabriel, "whose sword was ten inches longer than his." There seems to have been an effort on the part of some one to console the unhappy prisoner under his calamity. He was a writer for a rival theatre, receiving its advances up to the 13th of August, 1598. His improved play was brought out by the company of a theatre which stood much higher in the popular and the critical estimation a few months afterwards. There was an act of friendship somewhere. May we not believe that this proud man, who seems to have been keenly alive to neglect and injury—who says that "Daniel was at jealousies with him"—that "Drayton feared him"—that "he beat Marston, and took his pistol from him"—that "Sir William Alexander was not half kind to him"—that "Markham was but a base fellow"—that "such were Day and Middleton"—that "Sharp-ham, Day, Dekker, were all rogues, and that Minsheu was one"—that "Abraham Francis was a fool"*—may we not believe that some deep remembrance of unusual kind-

* All these passages are extracted from his 'Conversations with Drummond.'

ness induced him to write of Shakspeare, "I loved the *man*, and do honour his memory on this side idolatry as much as any. He was indeed honest, and of an open and free nature?" We have no hesitation in abiding by the common sense of Gifford, who treated with ineffable scorn all that has been written about Jonson's envy, and malignity, and coldness towards Shakspeare. We believe with him "that no feud, no jealousy ever disturbed their connection; that Shakspeare was pleased with Jonson, and that Jonson loved and admired Shakspeare." They worked upon essentially different principles of art; they had each their admirers and disciples; but the field in which they laboured was large enough for both of them, and they each cultivated it after his own fashion. With the exception of such occasional quarrels as those between Jonson and Dekker, the poets of that time lived as a generous brotherhood, whose cordial intercourse might soften many of the rigours of their worldly lot. Jonson was by nature proud, perhaps arrogant. His struggles with penury had made him proud. He had the inestimable possession of a well-educated boyhood; he had the consciousness of great abilities and great acquirements. He was thrown amongst a band of clever men, some of whom perhaps laughed, as Dekker unworthily did, at his honest efforts to set himself above the real disgrace of earning his bread by corrupt arts: who ridiculed his pimpled face, his "one eye lower than t' other," and his "coat like a coachman's coat, with slips under the arm-pits." So Aubrey describes him who laid down laws of criticism, and married music and painting to the most graceful verse. But when the bricklayer had the gratification of seeing his first comedy performed by the Lord Chamberlain's company, to

"Sport with human follies, not with crimes,"

there was one amongst that company strong enough to receive with kindness even the original prologue, in which the romantic drama, perhaps some of his own plays, were declaimed against by one who belonged to another school of art. Shakspeare could not

doubt that a man of vigorous understanding had arisen up to devote himself to the exhibition of "popular errors,"—humours—passing accidents of life and character. He himself worked upon more enduring materials; but he would nevertheless see that there was one fitted to deal with the comedy of manners in a higher spirit than had yet been displayed. Not only was the amended 'Every Man in his Humour' acted by Shakspeare's company, Shakspeare himself taking one of the characters; but the second comedy from the same satirist was first produced by that company in 1599. When the author, in his Induction, exclaims

"If any here chance to behold himself,
Let him not dare to challenge me of wrong;
For, if he shame to have his follies known,
First he should shame to act 'em: my strict
hand
Was made to seize on vice, and with a gripe
Squeeze out the humour of such spongy souls
As lick up every idle vanity,"—

the poet who "was not for an age, but for all time,"—he, especially, who never once comes before the audience in his individual character,—might gently smile at these high pretensions. But he would stretch out the hand of cordial friendship to the man; for he was in earnest—his indignation against vice was an honest one. Though a little personal vanity might peep out—though the satirist might "venture on the stage when the play is ended to exchange courtesies and compliments with gallants in the lord's rooms, to make all the house rise up in arms and to cry,—That's Horace, that's he, that's he, that's he, that pens and purges humours and diseases,"* Shakspeare's congratulations on the success of Asper—for so Jonson delighted to call himself—would come from the heart.

The things "done at the Mermaid" were not as yet. Francis Beaumont, who has made them immortal by his description, was at this period scarcely sixteen years of age. His 'Letter to Jonson' may, however, give us the best notion of the earlier convivial

intercourse of some of the illustrious band to whom the young dramatist refers:—

"Methinks the little wit I had is lost
Since I saw you; for wit is like a rest
Held up at tennis, which men do the best
With the best gamesters: what things have
we seen
Done at the Mermaid! heard words that have
been
So nimble, and so full of subtile flame,
As if that every one from whence they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
And had resolved to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life; then when there hath been
thrown
Wit able enough to justify the town
For three days past—wit that might warrant
be
For the whole city to talk foolishly
Till that were cancell'd: and when that was
gone,
We left an air behind us, which alone
Was able to make the two next companies
Right witty: though but downright fools,
mere wise."

Sociality was the fashion of those days—in moderation, not a bad fashion. Gifford has noticed this with great justness; "Domestic entertainments were, at that time, rare; the accommodations of a private house were ill calculated for the purposes of a social meeting: and taverns and ordinaries are therefore almost the only places in which we hear of such assemblies. This, undoubtedly, gives an appearance of licentiousness to the age, which, in strictness, does not belong to it. Long after the period of which we are now speaking, we seldom hear of the eminent characters of the day in their domestic circles."* Jonson laughs at his own disposition to conviviality in connection with his habitual abstemiousness: "Canary, the very elixir and spirit of wine! This is that our poet calls Castalian liquor, when he comes abroad now and then, once in a fortnight, and makes a good meal among players, where he has *caninum appetitum*; marry, at home he keeps a good philosophical diet, beans and buttermilk; an honest pure rogue, he will take you off three, four, five of these,

* 'Satiro-Mastix.'

* 'Memoirs of Ben Jonson,' p. cxc.

one after another, and look villainously when he has done, like a one-headed Cerberus."* He puts these words into the mouth of a buffoon. In his own person he speaks of himself in a nobler strain :

"I that spend half my nights, and all my days,
Here in a cell to get a dark pale face,
To come forth worth the ivy and the bays ;
And, in this age, can hope no other grace."†

The alternations of excessive labour and joyous relaxation belong to the energies of the poetical temperament. Jonson has been accused of excess in his pleasures. Drummond ill-naturedly says, "Drink is one of the elements in which he liveth." But no one affirmed that in his convivial meetings there was not something higher and better than sensual indulgence :—

"Ah, Ben !
Say how, or when
Shall we thy guests
Meet at those lyric feasts,
Made at the Sun,
The Dog, the Triple Tun ?
Where we such clusters had,
As made us nobly wild, not mad ;
And yet each verse of thine
Outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine."‡

GEORGE CHAPMAN, as Anthony Wood tells us, "was a person of most reverend aspect, religious and temperate, qualities rarely meeting in a poet." Anthony Wood has a low notion of the poetical character, as many other prosaic people have. He tells us of an unhappy verse-maker of small merit who was "exceedingly given to the vices of poets." Chapman was, however, the senior of the illustrious band who lighted up the close of the sixteenth century, and might be more reverend than many of them. He was seven years older than Shakspeare, being born in 1557. Yet his inventive faculties were brilliant to the last. Jonson told Drummond, in 1619, that "next himself only Fletcher and Chapman could make a masque." He said also, what was more important, that "Chapman and Fletcher were loved of him," No one can doubt the vigour of the poet who translated twelve books of

* 'Every Man out of his Humour.'

† 'The Poetaster.'

‡ Herrick's 'Hesperides.'

the Iliad in six weeks,—the daring fiery spirit of him who, in the opinion of the more polished translator, gave us a Homer such as he might have been before he had come to the years of discretion. This is meant by Pope for censure. Meres, in 1598, enumerates Chapman amongst the "tragic poets," and also amongst the "best poets for comedy." We have no evidence that he wrote before the period when Shakspeare raised the drama out of chaos. He had not the power to become a great dramatist in the strict sense of the word ; for his genius was essentially didactic. He could not go out of himself to paint all the varieties of passion and character in vivid action ; but he could analyze the passion, exhibit its peculiarities, describe its current, with wondrous force and originality, throwing in touches of the purest poetry, clothed in the most splendid combinations of language. Dryden has not done justice to him, when he says that "a dwarfish thought dressed up in gigantic words is his characteristic." There are the gigantic words, but the thought is rarely dwarfish. Had he become a dramatist ten years earlier, as he well might from the period in which he was born, we should have found more extravagance and less poetical fire. Shakspeare rendered the drama not so easy of approach by inferior men, as it was in the early days of the Greenes and Peeles. Chapman with his undramatic mind has done wonders in his own way.

JOHN FLETCHER was born in 1576. His father, the Bishop of London—he who poured into the ears of the unhappy Mary of Scots on the scaffold that *verbosam orationem*, as Camden has it, which had more regard to his own preferment than the Queen's conversion—he who, marrying a second time, fell under his royal mistress's displeasure, and died of grief and excessive tobacco, in 1596, "seeking to lose his sorrow in a mist of smoke,"*—he left his son John to carry his "sail of phantasy" into the dangerous waters of the theatre. The union of real talent with fashionable pretension, which in time made him one of the most popular

* Fuller's 'Worthies.'

of dramatists, and the lyrical genius which will place him for ever amongst the first of English poets, were budding only at the close of the sixteenth century. We can scarcely believe that his genius was only called out by the "wonderful consimilitude of fancy" between him and Francis Beaumont; and that his first play was produced only in 1607, when he was thirty-one and Beaumont twenty-one. It is possible that in his earlier days he wrote in conjunction with some of the veterans of the drama. Shakspeare is held to have been associated with him in the 'Two Noble Kinsmen.' We shall discuss that question elsewhere. At the end of the sixteenth century, Fletcher would be gathering materials, at any rate, for some of those pictures of manners which reveal to us too much of the profligacy of the fine people of the early part of the seventeenth century. The society of the great minds into which he would be thrown at the Falcon, and the Mermaid, and the Apollo Saloon, would call out and cherish that freshness of his poetical nature which survives, and indeed often rides over, the sapless conventionalities and frigid licentiousness of his fashionable experience. In the company of Shakspeare, and Jonson, and Chapman, and Donne, he would be taught there was something more in the friendship, and even in the mere intercourse of conviviality, of men of high intellect, than the town could give. He would learn from Jonson's 'Leges Convivales,' that there was a charm in the social hours of the "*eruditi, urbani, hilares, honesti*," which was rarely found amidst the courtly hunters after pleasure; and that a festival with them was something better than even the excitement of wine and music. A few years after this Fletcher ventured out of the track of that species of comedy in which he won his first success, giving a real poem to the public stage, which, with all its faults, was a noble attempt to emulate the lyrical and pastoral genius of Shakspeare. To our minds there is as much covert advice, if not gentle reproof, to Fletcher, as there is of just and cordial praise, in Jonson's verses upon the condemnation of 'The Faithful Shepherdess' by the audience of 1610:—

"The wise, and many-headed bench, that sits
Upon the life and death of plays and wits,
(Compos'd of gamester, captain, knight,
knight's man,
Lady, or pucelle, that wears mask or fan,
Velvet, or taffeta cap, rank'd in the dark
With the shop's foreman, or some such brave
spark
That may judge for his sixpence) had, before
They saw it half, damn'd thy whole play, and
more:
Their motives were, since it had not to do
With vices, which they look'd for, and came
to.
I, that am glad thy innocence was thy guilt,
And wish that all the Muses' blood were spilt
In such a martyrdom, to vex their eyes,
Do crown thy murder'd poem: which shall
rise
A glorified work to time, when fire
Or moths shall eat what all those fools ad-
mire."

The diary of Henslowe during the last three years of the sixteenth century contains abundant notices of MICHAEL DRAYTON as a dramatist. According to this record, of which we have no reason to doubt the correctness, there were extant in 1597 'Mother Red Cap,' written by him in conjunction with Anthony Munday; and a play without a name, which the manager calls a "book wherein is a part of a Welshman," by Drayton and Henry Chettle. In 1598 we have 'The Famous Wars of Henry I. and the Prince of Wales,' by Drayton and Thomas Dekker; 'Earl Goodwin and his three Sons,' by Drayton, Chettle, Dekker, and Robert Wilson; the 'Second Part of Goodwin,' by Drayton; 'Pierce of Exton,' by the same four authors; 'The Funeral of Richard Cœur de Lion,' by Wilson, Chettle, Munday, and Drayton; 'The Mad Man's Morris,' 'Hannibal and Hermes,' and 'Pierce of Winchester,' by Drayton, Wilson, and Dekker; 'William Longsword,' by Drayton; 'Chance Medley,' by Wilson, Munday, Drayton, and Dekker; 'Worse Afeard than Hurt,' 'Three Parts of the Civil Wars of France,' and 'Connan, Prince of Cornwall,' by Drayton and Dekker. In 1600 we have the 'Fair Constance of Rome,' in two parts, by Munday, Hathway, Drayton, and Dekker. In

1601, 'The Rising of Cardinal Wolsey,' by Munday, Drayton, Chettle, and Wentworth Smith. In 1602, 'Two Harpies,' by Dekker, Drayton, Middleton, Webster, and Munday. This is a most extraordinary record of the extent of dramatic associations in those days; and it is more remarkable as it regards Drayton, that his labours, which, as we see, were not entirely in copartnership, did not gain for him even the title of a dramatic poet in the next generation. Langbaine mentions him not at all. Philipps says nothing of his plays. Meres indeed thus writes of him: "We may truly term Michael Drayton *Tragediographus*, for his passionate penning the downfalls of valiant Robert of Normandy, chaste Matilda, and great Gaveston." But this praise has clearly reference to the 'Heroical Epistles' and the 'Legends.' If 'The Merry Devil of Edmonton' be his, the comedy does not place his dramatic powers in any very striking light; but it gives abundant proofs, in common with all his works, of a pure and gentle mind, and a graceful imagination. Meres is enthusiastic about his moral qualities; and his testimony also shows that the character for upright dealing which Shakspeare won so early was not universal amongst the poetical adventurers of that day: "As Aulus Persius Flaccus is reported among all writers to be of an honest and upright conversation, so Michael Drayton (*quem toties honoris et amoris causa nomino*), among scholars, soldiers, poets, and all sorts of people, is held for a man of virtuous disposition, honest conversation, and well-governed carriage, which is almost miraculous among good wits in these declining and corrupt times, when there is nothing but roguery in villainous man, and when cheating and craftiness is counted the cleanest wit and soundest wisdom." The good wits, according to Meres, are only parcel of the corrupt and declining times. Yet, after all, his dispraise of the times is scarcely original: "You rogue, here's lime in this sack too. There is nothing but roguery to be found in villainous man."* Jonson was an exception to the best of his contemporaries when he said of

Drayton that "he esteemed not of him." That Shakspeare loved him we may readily believe. They were nearly of an age, Drayton being only one year his elder. They were born in the same county—they had each the same love of natural scenery, and the same attachment to their native soil. Drayton exclaims—

"My native country then, which so brave spirits
hath bred,
If there be virtues yet remaining in thy
earth,
Or any good of thine thou bred'st into my
birth,
Accept it as thine own, whilst now I sing of
thee;
Of all thy later brood th' unworthiest though
I be."

It is his own Warwickshire which he invokes. They had each the same familiar acquaintance with the old legends and chronicles of English history; the same desire to present them to the people in forms which should associate the poetical spirit with a just patriotism. It was fortunate that they walked by different paths to the same object. However Drayton might have been associated for a few years with the minor dramatists of Shakspeare's day, it may be doubted whether his genius was at all dramatic. Yet was he truly a great poet in an age of great poets. Old Aubrey has given us one or two exact particulars of his life:—"He lived at the bay window house next the east end of St. Dunstan's Church, in Fleet Street." Would that bay window house were standing! Would that the other house of precious memory close by it, where Izaak Walton kept his haberdasher's shop, were standing also! He "who has not left a rivulet (so narrow that it may be stepped over) without honourable mention; and has animated hills and streams with life and passion above the dreams of old mythology;"* and he who delighted to sit and sing under the honeysuckle hedge while the shower fell so gently upon the teeming earth,—they loved not the hills and streams and verdant meadows the less because they daily looked upon

* 'Henry IV.,' Part I., Act II., Sc. iv.

* Charles Lamb.

the tide of London life in the busiest of her thoroughfares.

The 'Cleopatra' of SAMUEL DANIEL places him amongst the dramatic poets of this period; but his vocation was not to the drama. He was induced, by the persuasion of the Countess of Pembroke,

"To sing of state, and tragic notes to frame."

After Shakspeare had arisen he adhered to the model of the Greek theatre. According to Jonson, "Samuel Daniel was no poet." Jonson thought Daniel "envied him," as he wrote to the Countess of Rutland. He tells Drummond that "Daniel was at jealousies with him." Yet for all this even with Jonson he was "a good man." Spenser formed the same estimate of Daniel's genius as the Countess of Pembroke did:

"Then rouse thy feathers quickly, Daniel,
And to what course thou please thyself advance:

But most, meseems, thy accent will excel
In tragic plaints, and passionate mischance."*

Daniel did wisely when he confined his "tragic plaints" to narrative poetry. He went over the same ground as Shakspeare in his 'Civil Wars'; and there are passages of resemblance between the dramatist and the descriptive poet which are closer than mere accident could have produced. The imitation, on whatever side it was, was indicative of respect.

JOHN MARSTON, a man of original talent, took his Bachelor's degree at Oxford in 1592. There is very little known with any precision about his life; but a pretty accurate opinion of his character may be collected from the notices of his contemporaries, and from his own writings. He began in the most dangerous path of literary ambition, that of satire, bitter and personal:—

"Let others sing, as their good genius moves,
Of deep designs, or else of clipping loves.
Fair fall them all that with wit's industry
Do clothe good subjects in true poesy;
But as for me, my vexed thoughtful soul
Takes pleasure in displeasing sharp control.

* 'Colin Clout's come Home again.'

Quake, guzzle-dogs, that live on spotted lime,
Scud from the lashes of my yerking rhyme."*

His first performance, 'The Metamorphoses of Pygmalion's Image,' has been thought by Warton to have been written in ridicule of Shakspeare's Venus and Adonis. The author says,

"Know, I wrot

These idle rhymes, to note the odious spot
And blemish, that deforms the lineaments
Of modern poesy's habiliments."

In his parody, if parody it be, he has contrived to produce a poem, of which the licentiousness is the *only* quality. Thus we look upon a sleeping Venus of Titian, and see but the wonderful art of the painter; a dauber copies it, and then beauty becomes deformity. He is angry that his object is misunderstood, as well it might be:—

"O these same buzzing gnats

That sting my sleeping brows, these Nilus rats,

Half dung, that have their life from putrid slime,

These that do praise my loose lascivious rhyme,

For these same shades I seriously protest,

I slubbered up that chaos indigest,

To fish for fools, that stalk in goodly shape:

What though in velvet cloak, yet still an ape!"

He had the ordinary fate of satirists—to live in a state of perpetual warfare, and to have offences imputed to him of which he was blameless. The "galled jade" not only winces, but kicks. The comedy of 'The Malecontent,' written in 1600, appears to have been Marston's first play; it was printed in 1605. He says in the Preface, "In despite of my endeavours, I understand some have been most unadvisedly over-cunning in misinterpreting me, and with subtilty (as deep as hell) have maliciously spread ill rumours, which springing from themselves, might to themselves have heavily returned." Marston says in the Preface to one of his later plays, "So powerfully have I been enticed with the delights of poetry,

* 'Scourge of Villainy; Three Books of Satire:' 1598.

and (I must ingenuously confess), above better desert, so fortunate in these stage-pleasings, that (let my resolutions be never so fixed, to call mine eyes unto myself) I much fear that most lamentable death of him—

‘Qui nimis notus omnibus,
Ignotus moritur sibi.’—*Seneca*.

He adds, “the over-vehement pursuit of these delights hath been the sickness of my youth.” He unquestionably writes as one who is absorbed by his pursuit; over whom it has the mastery. In his plays, as well as in his satires, there is no languid task-work; but, as may be expected, he cannot go out of himself. It is John Marston who is lashing vice and folly, whatever character may fill the scene; and from first to last in his reproof of licentiousness we not only see his familiarity with many gross things, but cannot feel quite assured that he looks upon them wholly with pure eyes. His temper was no doubt capricious. It is clear that Jonson had been attacked by him previous to the production of ‘The Poetaster.’ He endured the lash which was inflicted on him in return, and became again, as he probably was before, the friend of Jonson, to whom he dedicates ‘The Malecontent’ in 1605. Gifford has clearly made out that the Crispinus of ‘The Poetaster’ was Marston. ‘Tucca thus describes him, in addressing the player: “Go, and be acquainted with him then; he is a gentleman, parcel poet, you slave; his father was a man of worship, I tell thee. Go, he pens high, lofty, *in a new stalking strain*, bigger than half the rhymers in the town again: he was born to fill thy mouth, Minotaurus, he was; he will teach thee to tear and rand. Rascal, to him, cherish his muse, go; thou hast forty—forty shillings, I mean, stinkard; give him in earnest, do, he shall write for thee, slave! If he pen for thee once, thou shalt not need to travel with thy pumps full of gravel any more, after a blind jade and a hamper, and stalk upon boards and barrel heads to an old cracked trumpet.” Jonson, in the same play, has parodied Marston’s manner, and has introduced many of his expressions, in the following verses, which are produced as those of Crispinus:—

“Ramp up, my genius, be not retrograde;
But boldly nominate a spade a spade.
What, shall thy lubrical and glibbery muse
Live, as she were defunct, like punk in stews!
Alas! that were no modern consequence,
To have cothurnal buskins frightened hence.
No, teach thy Incubus to poetize,
And throw abroad thy spurious snottories,
Upon that puffed-up lump of balmy froth,
Or clumsy chilblain’d judgment; that with
oath
Magnificates his merit; and bespawls
The conscious time with humorous foam, and
brawls,
As if his organons of sense would crack
The sinews of my patience. Break his back,
O poets all and some! for now we list
Of strenuous vengeance to clutch the fist.”

The following advice is subsequently given to him:—

“You must not hunt for wild outlandish terms,
To stuff out a peculiar dialect;
But let your matter run before your words.
And if at any time you chance to meet
Some Gallo-Belgic phrase, you shall not
straight
Rack your poor verse to give it entertainment,
But let it pass; and do not think yourself
Much damnified if you do leave it out,
When nor your understanding nor the sense
Could well receive it.”

Marston, with all his faults, was a scholar and a man of high talent; and it is pleasant to know that he and Ben were friends after this wordy war. He appears to us to describe himself in the following narrative of a scholar in ‘What You Will:’—

“I was a scholar: seven useful springs
Did I deflour in quotations
Of cross’d opinions ’bout the soul of man;
The more I learnt the more I learnt to doubt,
Knowledge and wit, faith’s foes, turn faith
about.
Nay, mark, list! Delight, Delight, my spaniel,
slept, whilst I bauz’d* leaves,
Toss’d o’er the dunces, por’d on the old print

* Mr. Dilke, in his valuable ‘Selection from the Early Dramatic Writers,’ prints three of Marston’s plays. He says this word may be derived from *baiser*, to kiss; and that *basse* has been used by Chaucer in this sense.

Of titled words, and still my spaniel slept.
 Whilst I wasted lamp-oil, 'bated my flesh,
 Shrunk up my veins, and still my spaniel
 slept.

And still I held converse with Zabarell,
 Aquinas, Scotus, and the musty saw
 Of antic Donate, still my spaniel slept.
 Still on went I, first *an sit anima*,
 Then, an it were mortal; oh, hold, hold,
 At that they are at brain buffets, fell by the
 ears,

Amain, pell-mell together; still my spaniel
 slept.

Then whether 't were corporeal, local, fix'd,
Extraduce; but whether 't had free will
 Or no, O philosophers,

Stood banding factions, all so strongly propp'd,
 I stagger'd, knew not which was firmer part;
 But thought, quoted, read, observed, and
 pried,

Stuff'd noting books, and still my spaniel
 slept.

At length he wak'd, and yawn'd, and by yon
 sky,
 For aught I knew, he knew as much as I.

How 'twas created, how the soul exists:

One talks of motes, the soul was made of
 motes;

Another fire, t' other light, a third a spark of
 star-like nature;

Hippo, water; Anaximenes, air;

Aristoxenus, music; Critias, I know not what;

A company of odd Phrenetici

Did eat my youth; and when I crept abroad,

Finding my numbness in this nimble age,

I fell a railing."

In the following Chapters of this Book we shall give a brief analysis of several of the plays belonging to this period, which have been ascribed to Shakspeare.

CHAPTER II.

SIR JOHN OLDCASTLE. PART I.

THE mode in which some of the German critics have spoken of this play is a rebuke to dogmatic assertions and criticism. Schlegel says—putting 'Sir John Oldcastle,' 'Thomas Lord Cromwell,' and 'The Yorkshire Tragedy' in the same class—"The last three pieces are not only unquestionably Shakspeare's, but in my opinion they deserve to be classed among his best and maturest works. . . . 'Thomas Lord Cromwell' and 'Sir John Oldcastle' are biographical dramas, and models in this species; the first is linked, from its subject, to 'Henry VIII.,' and the second to 'Henry V.'" Tieck is equally confident in assigning the authorship of this play to Shakspeare. Ulrici, on the contrary, takes a more sober view of the matter. He says—"The whole betrays a poet who endeavoured to form himself on Shakspeare's model, nay, even to imitate him,

but who stood far below him in mind and talent." Our own critics, relying upon the internal evidence, agreed in rejecting it. Malone could "not perceive the least trace of our great poet in any part of this play." He observes that it was originally entered on the Stationers' registers without the name of Shakspeare; but he does not mention the fact, that of two editions printed in 1600 one bears the name of Shakspeare, the other not. The one which has the name says—"As it hath bene lately acted by the Right honorable the Earle of Nottingham, Lord High Admirall of England, his Seruants." In 1594 a play of Shakspeare's might have been acted, as, we believe, 'Hamlet' was, at Henslowe's theatre, which was that of the Lord High Admiral his servants, but in 1600 a play of Shakspeare's would have unquestionably been acted by the Lord Chamberlain

his servants. However, this conjectural evidence is quite unnecessary. Henslowe, the head of the Lord Admiral's company, as we learn by his diary, on the 16th of October, 1599, paid "for The first part of the Lyfe of Sir Jhon Ouldcastell, and in earnest of the Second Pte, for the use of the company, ten pound;" and the money was received by "Thomas Downton" "to pay Mr. Monday, Mr. Drayton, Mr. Wilson, and Hathaway." We might here dismiss the question of the authorship of this play, did it not furnish a very curious example of the imperfect manner in which it was attempted to imitate the excellence and to rival the popularity of Shakspeare's best historical plays at the time of their original production. It is not the least curious also of the circumstances connected with 'The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle,' that, whilst the bookseller affixed the name of Shakspeare to the performance, it has been supposed that the Falstaff of his 'Henry IV.' was pointed at in the following prologue:—

"The doubtful title, gentlemen, prefix'd
Upon the argument we have in hand,
May breed suspense, and wrongfully disturb
The peaceful quiet of your settled thoughts.
To stop which scruple, let this brief suffice:
*It is no pamper'd glutton we present,
Nor aged counsellor to youthful sin,
But one, whose virtue shone above the rest,
A valiant martyr, and a virtuous peer;
In whose true faith and loyalty, express'd
Unto his sovereign and his country's weal,
We strive to pay that tribute of our love
Your favours merit. Let fair truth be grac'd,
Since forg'd invention former time defac'd.*"

The line in the prologue which we have just quoted—

"Since forg'd invention former time defac'd,"

might appear to point to an earlier period of the stage than that in which Shakspeare's 'Henry IV.' was produced. Indeed, the old play of 'The Famous Victories' contains the character of Sir John Oldcastle. He is a low, ruffianly sort of fellow, who may be called "an aged counsellor to youthful sin;" but he is not represented as "a pampered

glutton." In our opinion, there was either another play besides 'The Famous Victories' in which the name of Oldcastle was introduced, or the remarks of contemporary writers applied to Shakspeare's Falstaff, who had originally borne the name of Oldcastle. The following passage is from Fuller's 'Church History':—"Stage-poets have themselves been very bold with, and others very merry at, the memory of Sir John Oldcastle, whom they have fancied a boon companion, a jovial royster, and a coward to boot. The best is, Sir John Falstaff hath relieved the memory of Sir John Oldcastle, and of late is substituted buffoon in his place." This description of Fuller cannot apply to the Sir John Oldcastle of 'The Famous Victories.' The dull dog of that play is neither a jovial companion nor a coward to boot. Whether or not Falstaff was originally called Oldcastle, Shakspeare was, after the character was fairly established as Falstaff, anxious to vindicate himself from the charge that he had attempted to represent the Oldcastle of history. In the epilogue to 'The Second Part of Henry IV.' we find this passage:—"For anything I know, Falstaff shall die of a sweat, unless already he be killed with your hard opinions; for Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man." 'The Second Part of Henry IV.,' the epilogue of which contains this passage, was entered in the Stationers' registers in 1600, and was published in that year. When 'The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle' was published in the same year, *Falstaff* is distinctly recognised as the companion of Prince Henry. In that play Henry V. is represented as robbed by the parson of Wrotham, a very queer hedge-priest indeed, bearing the name of Sir John, as if in rivalry of another Sir John; and the following dialogue takes place:—

"*Sir John.* Sirrah, no more ado; come, come, give me the money you have. Despatch; I cannot stand all day.

K. Henry. Well, if thou wilt needs have it, here it is. Just the proverb, one thief robs another. Where the devil are all my old thieves? Falstaff, that villain, is so fat, he cannot get on his horse; but methinks Poins and Peto should be stirring hereabouts.

Sir John. How much is there on't, o' thy word?"

Falstaff is again mentioned in the same scene with the priest, who asserts that the king was once a thief; and in answer to the question "How canst thou tell?" replies,—

"How? because he once robbed me before I fell to the trade myself, when that foul villainous guts, that led him to all that roguery, was in his company there, that Falstaff."

We have here tolerable evidence that Falstaff was "not the man" Oldcastle in 1600. And yet the following very remarkable letter, or dedication, is written some years after:—

"To my noble friend Sir Henry Bouchier :

"Sir Harry Bouchier, you are descended of noble ancestry, and in the duty of a good man love to hear and see fair reputation preserved from slander and oblivion. Wherefore to you I dedicate this edition of 'Ocleve,' where Sir John Oldcastle appears to have been a man of valour and virtue, and only lost in his own times because he would not bow under the foul superstition of Papistry, from whence, in so great a light of Gospel and learning, that there is not yet a more universal departure, is to me the greatest scorn of men. But of this more in another place, and in preface will you please to hear me that which follows? A young gentle lady of your acquaintance, having read the works of Shakespeare, made me this question: How Sir John Falstaffe, or Fastolf, as it is written in the statute-book of Maudlin College in Oxford, where every day that society were bound to make memory of his soul, could be dead in Harry's the Fifth's time and again live in the time of Harry the Sixth to be banished for cowardice? Whereto I made answer that this was one of those humours and mistakes for which Plato banished all poets out of his commonwealth; that Sir John Falstaff was in those times a valiant soldier, as appears by a book in the Heralds' office dedicated unto him by a herald who had been with him, if I well remember, for the space of 25 years in the French wars; that he seems also to have been a man of learning, because in a library of Oxford I find a book of dedicating churches sent from him for a present unto Bishop Wainfleet, and inscribed with his own name. That in Shakespeare's first show of 'Harry the Fifth,'

the person with which he undertook to play a buffoon was not Falstaff, but Sir John Oldcastle; and that, offence being worthily taken by personages descended from his title, as peradventure by many others also who ought to have him in honourable memory, the poet was put to make an ignorant shift of abusing Sir John Falstoppe, a man not inferior of virtue, though not so famous in piety as the other, who gave witness unto the trust of our reformation with a constant and resolute martyrdom, unto which he was pursued by the priests, bishops, monks, and friars of those days. Noble sir, this is all my preface. God keep you and me, and all Christian people, from the bloody designs of that cruel religion.

"Yours in all observance,

"RICH. JAMES."

This letter is contained in a manuscript preserved in the Bodleian Library, written by Dr. Richard James, who died in 1638. The manuscript to which it is prefixed is entitled 'The Legend and Defence of the Noble Knight and Martyr, Sir John Oldcastel,' and has been published by Mr. Halliwell, having been pointed out to him by the Rev. Dr. Bliss*.

The "young gentle lady" who, according to this letter, was so well employed in studying Shakspeare's historical plays, read them as many other persons read, without any very accurate perception of what essentially belongs to the province of imagination, and of what is literally true. Whatever similarity there may be in the names of Sir John Falstaff and Sir John Fastolf, the young lady might have perceived that the poet had not the slightest intention of proposing the Fastolf of 'Henry VI.' as the Falstaff of 'Henry IV.' Assuredly the Falstaff that we last see in the closing scene of 'The Second Part of Henry IV.'—a jester, surfeit-swelled, old, profane, as the king denounces him—is not the Fastolf that makes his appearance at the battle of Patay, in 'The First Part of Henry VI.,' and is subsequently degraded from being a knight of the Garter for his conduct on that occasion. In these scenes of 'Henry VI.' Shakspeare drew an historical character and represented an historical fact. The degradation of Fastolf was in all probability

* 'On the Character of Sir John Falstaff,' 1841.

an unjust sentence—as unjust as that pronounced by the worthy writer of the letter in the Bodleian Library, that the wittiest of all Shakspeare's creations was "a buffoon," and that he might be confounded with the fighting knight whose chief distinction was the garter on his leg. Fastolf was a respectable personage no doubt in his day, but not "sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, true Jack Falstaff, valiant Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff." It appears to us, therefore, that, in the same manner as the "young gentle lady" and Dr. Richard James, somewhat ignorantly as we think, confounded Fastolf and Falstaff, so they erred in a similar way by believing that "in Shakspeare's first show of Harry the Fifth the person with which he undertook to play a buffoon was not Falstaff, but Sir John Oldcastle." Fuller, in his 'Worthies,' speaking of Sir John Falstaff, has the same complaint, as we have seen, against "stage-poets." Now, admitting what appears possible, that Shakspeare in his 'Henry IV.' originally had the name of Oldcastle where we now find that of Falstaff, is it likely that he could have meant the champion of the Reformation of Wickliff, who was cruelly put to death for heresy in the fourth year of Henry V., to have been the boon companion of the youthful prince; and who, before the king went to the French wars, died quietly in his bed, "e'en at the turning of the tide?" And yet there is little doubt that, when Shakspeare adopted a name familiar to the stage, he naturally raised up this species of absurd misconception, which had the remarkable fate of being succeeded by a mistake still more absurd, that Falstaff and Fastolf were one and the same. It is, however, extremely probable that there were other plays in which the character of Sir John Oldcastle was presented historically, and falsely presented; that from this circumstance Shakspeare saw the necessity of substituting another name for Oldcastle, and of making the declaration "Oldcastle died a martyr, and this is not the man;" and that the authors of the play before us, 'The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle,' adopted a subject with which the public mind was at that

time familiar, and presented Sir John Oldcastle upon the stage, in a manner that would be agreeable to "personages descended from his title," and to the great body of the people "who ought to have him in honourable memory." Whether the reputation of Oldcastle derived much benefit from their labours remains to be seen.

The play opens with a quarrel in the street of Hereford between Lord Herbert, Lord Powis, and their followers; which is put down by the judges, who are holding the assize in the town. The commencement of the conflict, in which blood was shed, is thus described:—

"Lord Powis detracted from the power of Rome,
Affirming Wickliff's doctrine to be true,
And Rome's erroneous: hot reply was made
By the Lord Herbert; they were traitors all
That would maintain it. Powis answered,
They were as true, as noble, and as wise
As ye; they would defend it with their lives;
He nam'd for instance, sir John Oldcastle,
The Lord Cobham: Herbert replied again,
He, thou, and all are traitors that so hold.
The lie was given, the several factions drawn,
And so enrag'd that we could not appease it."

The second scene introduces us to the Bishop of Rochester, denouncing Lord Cobham (Oldcastle), as an heretic, to the Duke of Suffolk. The bishop is supported by Sir John of Wrotham, whose zeal is so boisterous as to receive the following rebuke from the Duke:—

"Oh, but you must not swear; it ill becomes
One of your coat to rap out bloody oaths."

The king appears, to hear the complaint of the churchman; and he promises to send for Oldcastle "and school him privately." In the third scene we have Lord Cobham and an aged servant, and Lord Powis arrives in disguise, and is concealed by Cobham. In the second act we have a comic scene, amusing enough, but anything but original; a sumner arrives to cite Lord Cobham before the Ecclesiastical Court, and the old servant of the noble reformer makes the officer eat the citation. Nashe tells us in his 'Pierce Pennylesse' that he once saw Robert Greene "make

an apparitor eat his citation, wax and all, very handsomely served 'twixt two dishes." We have something like the same incident in the play of the 'Pinner of Wakefield.' The scene changes to London, where we have an assembly of rebels, who give out that Oldcastle will be their general. In the next scene, which is probably the best sustained of the play, we have Henry and Lord Cobham in conference:—

K. Henry. 'T is not enough, Lord Cobham, to submit;

You must forsake your gross opinion.

The bishops find themselves much injured;

And though, for some good service you have done,

We for our part are pleased to pardon you,
Yet they will not so soon be satisfied.

Cob. My gracious lord, unto your majesty,
Next unto my God, I do owe my life;

And what is mine, either by nature's gift,

Or fortune's bounty, all is at your service.

But for obedience to the pope of Rome,

I owe him none; nor shall his shaveling
priests,

That are in England, alter my belief.

If out of Holy Scripture they can prove

That I am in an error, I will yield,

And gladly take instruction at their hands:

But otherwise I do beseech your grace

My conscience may not be encroach'd upon.

K. Henry. We would be loth to press our
subjects' bodies,

Much less their souls, the dear redeemed
part

Of Him that is the ruler of us all:

Yet let me counsel you, that might command.

Do not presume to tempt them with ill words,

Nor suffer any meetings to be had

Within your house; but to the uttermost

Disperse the flocks of this new gathering sect.

Cob. My liege, if any breathe, that dares
come forth,

And say, my life in any of these points

Deserves the attainder of ignoble thoughts,

Here stand I, craving no remorse at all,

But even the utmost rigour may be shown."

The Bishop of Rochester appears, and denounces Cobham for the contempt shown to his citation; the king reproves the bishop, and dismisses Oldcastle in safety. It is evident that the dramatic capabilities of such a scene furnish an occasion for the dis-

play of high poetical power. The interview between Henry and his faithful friend and adherent; the anxiety of the reformer to vindicate himself from disloyalty, whilst he honestly supported his own opinions; the natural desire of the king to resist innovation, whilst he respected the virtues of the innovator,—points like these would have been handled by Shakspeare, or one imbued with his spirit, in a manner that would have lived and abided in our memories. The lines that we have quoted, which are the best in the scene, furnish a sufficient proof that the subject was in feeble hands.

The third act opens to us the conspiracy of Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey. The conspirators meet Lord Cobham. The mode in which they introduce their purpose is spirited and dramatic. Cobham has invited them to his house, and promises them hunters' fare and a hunt. Cambridge thus replies, before he presents the paper which discloses the plot:—

Cam. Nay, but the stag which we desire to
strike,

Lives not in Cowling: if you will consent,

And go with us, we'll bring you to a forest

Where runs a lusty herd; among the which

There is a stag superior to the rest,

A stately beast, that, when his fellows run,

He leads the race, and beats the sullen earth,

As though he scorn'd it with his trampling
hoofs;

Aloft he bears his head, and with his breast,

Like a huge bulwark, counterchecks the
wind:

And, when he standeth still, he stretcheth
forth

His proud ambitious neck, as if he meant

To wound the firmament with forked horns.

Cob. 'T is pity such a goodly beast should
die.

Cam. Not so, sir John; for he is tyrannous,

And gores the other deer, and will not keep

Within the limits are appointed him.

Of late he's broke into a several,

Which doth belong to me, and there he spoils

Both corn and pasture. Two of his wild race,

Alike for stealth and covetous encroaching,

Already are removed; if he were dead,

I should not only be secure from hurt,

But with his body make a royal feast."

Cobham then dissembles, and asks—

“Is not this a train laid to entrap my life?”
They offer to swear fidelity; but he requires them only to subscribe the writing. The time and place of meeting are appointed, and they part. Cobham puts the paper in his pocket, and goes off to betray them to the king. The state-morality of the age of Elizabeth might perhaps have made this incident more palatable to an audience of that day than to ourselves; but we doubt whether Shakspeare would have put this burthen upon the soul of one whom he wished to represent as a hero and a martyr. We have more scenes of the rebels; followed by the scene which we have already noticed of the parson robbing the king. The same worthy divine is afterwards found in the king’s camp, dicing with his majesty; and then the robbery is discovered, and the robber pardoned. The rebels who were in the field, headed by Sir Roger Acton, are routed. The Bishop of Rochester affirms that they were incited by Cobham, who arrives at the moment of the accusation to prove his loyalty by denouncing Scroop, Grey, and Cambridge. The king is satisfied; but subsequently the Bishop of Rochester seizes Cobham, and confines him in the Tower, from which he very soon escapes. With the exception of a scene in which Cambridge and the other conspirators are seized by the king, the whole of the fifth act is occupied by the wanderings of Cobham and his wife, their disguises and their escapes. The following scene is prettily imagined, and gracefully expressed:—

“*Cob.* Come, madam, happily escaped. Here let us sit;

This place is far remote from any path;
And here awhile our weary limbs may rest
To take refreshing, free from the pursuit
Of envious Rochester.

L. Cob. But where, my lord,
Shall we find rest for our disquiet minds?
There dwell untamed thoughts, that hardly stoop
To such abasement of disdained rags;
We were not wont to travel thus by night,
Especially on foot.

Cob. No matter, love;

Extremities admit no better choice,
And, were it not for thee, say froward time
Imposed a greater task, I would esteem it
As lightly as the wind that blows upon us:
But in thy sufferance I am doubly task’d;
Thou wast not wont to have the earth thy stool,
Nor the moist dewy grass thy pillow, nor
Thy chamber to be the wide horizon.

L. Cob. How can it seem a trouble, having you

A partner with me in the worst I feel?
No, gentle lord, your presence would give ease

To death itself, should he now seize upon me.

[*She produces some bread and cheese, and a bottle.*]

Behold, what my foresight hath underta’en,
For fear we faint; they are but homely cates;
Yet, sauced with hunger, they may seem as sweet

As greater dainties we were wont to taste.

Cob. Praise be to Him whose plenty sends both this

And all things else our mortal bodies need!
Nor scorn we this poor feeding, nor the state
We now are in; for what is it on earth,
Nay, under heaven, continues at a stay?
Ebbs not the sea, when it hath overflow’d?
Follows not darkness when the day is gone?
And see we not sometimes the eye of heaven
Dimm’d with o’er-flying clouds? There’s not that work

Of careful nature or of cunning art,
How strong, how beauteous, or how rich it be,
But falls in time to ruin. Here, gentle madam,

In this one draught I wash my sorrow down.

[*Drinks.*]

The persecuted pair fall asleep; and, a murdered body being found near them, they are apprehended as the murderers, and conducted to trial. They are discharged through the discovery of the real murderer, and fly with Lord Powis into Wales.

It will be evident from this analysis that ‘The First Part of Sir John Oldcastle’ is entirely deficient in dramatic unity. Shakspeare in representing a series of historical events did not of course attempt to sustain that unity of idea which we see so strikingly in his best tragedies and comedies. We have not one great action, but a succession of

actions; and yet, through his wonderful power of characterization, and his skill in grouping a series of events round one leading event, we have a principle upon which the mind can determinately rest, and rightly comprehend the whole dramatic movement. In the play before us there is no distinct relation between one scene and another. We forget the connection between Oldcastle and the events in which he is implicated; and, when he himself appears on the scene, the

development of character, in which a real poet would have luxuriated, is made subordinate to the hurry of the perplexed though monotonous movement of the story. Thoroughly to understand the surpassing power of Shakspeare in the management of the historical drama, it might be desirable to compare 'King John,' or 'Richard II.,' or 'Richard III.,' or 'Henry VIII.,' with this play; but, after all, the things do not admit of comparison.

CHAPTER III.

THOMAS LORD CROMWELL.

THE first edition of this play was published in 1602, under the title of 'The Chronicle History of Thomas Lord Cromwell.' No name or initials of an author appear in the title-page. In 1613 appeared 'The true Chronicle Historie of the whole life and death of Thomas Lord Cromwell. As it hath beene sundry times publikely Acted by the Kings Majesties Seruants. Written by W. S.' In 1602 the registers of the Stationers' Company had the entry of 'A Booke called the Lyfe and Deathe of the Lord Cromwell, as yt was lately acted by the Lord Chamberleyn his servants.' It appears, therefore, that the play was originally performed, and continued to be performed, by the company in which Shakspeare was a chief proprietor. Beyond the initials W. S. there is no external evidence whatever to attribute the play to the great dramatizer of English history.

Schlegel, as we have seen, calls 'Sir John Oldcastle,' and 'Thomas Lord Cromwell,' "biographical dramas and models in this species." We have no hesitation in affirming that a biographical drama, especially such a drama as 'Thomas Lord Cromwell,' is essentially undramatic. 'Oldcastle' takes a portion only of the life of its hero; but 'Cromwell' gives us the story of the man from his boyhood to his execution. The resemblance which it bears to any play of Shakspeare's is solely in the structure of the

title; and that parallel holds good only with regard to one play, 'Lear,' according to its original title, the 'True Chronicle Historie of the Life and Death of King Lear and his three Daughters.' In the folio collection of 1623 we have indeed 'The Life and Death of King John,' 'The Life and Death of Richard II.,' 'The Life of King Henry V.,' 'The Life and Death of Richard III.,' and 'The Life of King Henry VIII.' So in the same edition we have 'The Life and Death of Julius Cæsar.' But our readers are perfectly aware that in all these dramas a very small portion of the life of the hero of each is included in the action. Shakspeare knew his art too well to attempt to teach history dramatically by connecting a series of isolated events solely by their relation to a principal agent, without any other dependence. Nothing, for example, can be more complete in itself than the action of 'Richard II.,' or that of 'Henry V.,' of 'Richard III.,' and of 'Henry VIII.' We have in these pieces nearly all the condensation which pure tragedy requires. But in 'Thomas Lord Cromwell,' on the contrary, what Shakspeare would have *told* in a few words, reserving himself for an exhibition of character in the more striking situations, is actually *presented* to us in a succession of scenes that have no relation to any action of deepening interest—chapter upon chapter which might have been very well spared, if

one chapter, that of the elevation and fall of Cromwell, had occupied a space proportioned to its importance.

We begin the drama in the shop of old Cromwell, the blacksmith, at Putney, where young Cromwell, with a want of sense that ill accords with his future advancement, insists that his father's men shall leave off work because their noise disturbs his study. His father comes, and like a sensible and honest man reproves his son for his vagaries; and then the ambitious youth, who proclaims the purpose of his presaging soul, that he will build a palace

"As fine as is King Henry's house at Sheen,"
thus soliloquizes:—

"Crom. Why should my birth keep down
my mounting spirit?

Are not all creatures subject unto time—
To time, who doth abuse the cheated world,
And fills it full of hodge-podge bastardy?
There's legions now of beggars on the earth
That their original did spring from kings;
And many monarchs now, whose fathers were
The riff-raff of their age: for time and fortune
Wears out a noble train to beggary;
And from the dunghill millions do advance
To state and mark in this admiring world.
This is but course, which in the name of fate
Is seen as often as it whirls about.
The river Thames, that by our door doth pass,
His first beginning is but small and shallow;
Yet keeping on his course grows to a sea.
And likewise Wolsey, the wonder of our age,
His birth as mean as mine, a butcher's son;
Now who within this land a greater man?
Then, Cromwell, cheer thee up, and tell thy
soul,

That thou mayst live to flourish and control."

The young man, who despises work, immediately gets employment without seeking it,—to be secretary to the English merchants at Antwerp. Then commences the secondary action of the drama, which consists of the adventures of one Banister, an English merchant, who is persecuted by Bagot, a usurer, and relieved by a foreign merchant. It is by no means clear what this has to do with Thomas Lord Cromwell; but it may be satisfactory to know that eventually the

usurer is hanged and the merchant is restored to competence.

It would have been difficult, with all the author's contempt for unity of action, to have contrived to have told the whole story of Cromwell dramatically; and so he occasionally gives us a chorus. The second act thus opens:—

"Now, gentlemen, imagine that young
Cromwell's

In Antwerp, leiger for the English merchants;
And Banister, to shun this Bagot's hate,
Hearing that he hath got some of his debts,
Is fled to Antwerp, with his wife and children;
Which Bagot hearing is gone after them,
And thither sends his bills of debt before,
To be revenged on wretched Banister.
What doth fall out, with patience sit and see,
A just requital of false treachery."

Cromwell has nothing to do with this "just requital of false treachery,"—which requital consists in the usurer being arrested for purchasing the king's stolen jewels. Cromwell gets as tired of keeping accounts as he previously was of the din of his father's smithy; so all in a moment he throws up his commission and sets off upon his travels to Italy, having very opportunely met in Antwerp with Hodge, his father's man. And so we get through the second act.

In the third act the capricious lad and his servant are standing penniless upon the bridge at Florence, and their immediate necessities are relieved by the generous Italian merchant who was succouring the distress of the Englishman in the first act. Cromwell is always moving; and he sets off for Bononia, where he rescues, by a stratagem, Russell the Earl of Bedford from the agents of the French king. We have the chorus again in the middle of the act:—

"Thus far you see how Cromwell's fortune
pass'd.

The Earl of Bedford, being safe in Mantua,
Desires Cromwell's company into France,
To make requital for his courtesy;
But Cromwell doth deny the earl his suit,
And tells him that those parts he meant to see,
He had not yet set footing on the land;
And so directly takes his way to Spain;
The earl to France; and so they both do part.

Now let your thoughts, as swift as is the wind,
Skip some few years that Cromwell spent in
travel;

And now imagine him to be in England,
Servant unto the master of the rolls;
Where in short time he there began to flourish:
An hour shall show you what few years did
cherish."

The scene shifts to London, where Sir Christopher Hales is giving an entertainment to Cardinal Wolsey and Sir Thomas More, with Cromwell waiting on the guests. The sudden preferment of Cromwell to the highest confidence of Wolsey is accomplished with a celerity which was perfectly necessary when the poet had so many events to tell us:

"*Wol.* Sir Christopher, is that your man?

Hales. An't like

Your grace, he is a scholar, and a linguist;
One that hath travelled through many parts
Of Christendom, my lord.

Wol. My friend, come nearer: have you
been a traveller?

Crom. My lord,

I have added to my knowledge the Low
Countries,

With France, Spain, Germany, and Italy;
And though small gain of profit I did find,
Yet it did please my eye, content my mind.

Wol. What do you think then of the several
states

And princes' courts as you have travelled?

Crom. My lord, no court with England
may compare,

Neither for state nor civil government.
Lust dwells in France, in Italy, and Spain,
From the poor peasant to the prince's train.
In Germany and Holland, riot serves;
And he that most can drink, most he deserves.
England I praise: not for I here was born,
But that she laughs the others unto scorn.

Wol. My lord, there dwells within that
spirit more

Than can be discern'd by the outward eye:—
Sir Christopher, will you part with your man?

Hales. I have sought to proffer him unto
your lordship;

And now I see he hath preferr'd himself.

Wol. What is thy name?

Crom. Cromwell, my lord.

Wol. Then, Cromwell, here we make thee
solicitor

Of our causes, and nearest, next ourself;
Gardiner, give you kind welcome to the man."

The fourth act opens again with a chorus:—

"Now Cromwell's highest fortunes do begin.

Wolsey, that loved him as he did his life,
Committed all his treasure to his hands.
Wolsey is dead; and Gardiner, his man,
Is now created bishop of Winchester.

Pardon, if we omit all Wolsey's life,
Because our play depends on Cromwell's
death.

Now sit and see his highest state of all,
His height of rising, and his sudden fall.
Pardon the errors are already past,
And live in hope the best doth come at last.
My hope upon your favour doth depend,
And looks to have your liking ere the end."

It was certainly needless for the author to apologize for omitting "*all* Wolsey's life;" but the apology is curious as exhibiting his rude notions of what was properly within the province of the drama. We have now Cromwell, after the death of Wolsey, become Sir Thomas Cromwell; and Gardiner makes a sudden resolution that he will have his head. The Florence merchant comes to London in want; and we presently find him at the hospitable board of Cromwell, with money-bags showered upon him, and his debts paid. We have in this act a scene between Gardiner and Cromwell which, feeble as it is, is amongst the best passages of the play:—

"*Crom.* Good morrow to my lord of Win-
chester: I know

You bear me hard about the abbey lands.

"*Gard.* Have I not reason, when religion's
wrong'd?

You had no colour for what you have done.

Crom. Yes, the abolishing of antichrist,
And of his popish order from our realm.
I am no enemy to religion;

But what is done, it is for England's good.
What did they serve for, but to feed a sort
Of lazy abbots and of full-fed friars?

They neither plough nor sow, and yet they
reap

The fat of all the land, and suck the poor.

Look, what was theirs is in King Henry's
hands;

His wealth before lay in the abbey lands.

Gard. Indeed these things you have alleged,
my lord;

When, God doth know, the infant yet unborn
Will curse the time the abbeyes were pull'd
down.

I pray now where is hospitality?
Where now may poor distressed people go,
For to relieve their need, or rest their bones,
When weary travel doth oppress their limbs?
And where religious men should take them in,
Shall now be kept back with a mastiff dog;
And thousand thousand——"

Gardiner suborns witnesses to impute treasonable words to Cromwell, and absolves them by crucifix and holy water.

The real action of the play commences at the fourth act; all which precedes might have been told by a skilful poet in a dozen lines. The fifth act presents us the arrest of Cromwell; and after a soliloquy in the Tower, and a very feeble scene between the unhappy man, Gardiner, and the Dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk, his son is introduced, of whom we have before heard nothing:—

"*Lieu.* Here is your son, sir, come to take his leave.

Crom. To take his leave? Come hither, Harry Cromwell.

Mark, boy, the last words that I speak to thee:
Flatter not Fortune, neither fawn upon her;
Gape not for state, yet lose no spark of honour:
Ambition, like the plague, see thou eschew it;
I die for treason, boy, and never knew it.
Yet let thy faith as spotless be as mine,
And Cromwell's virtues in thy face shall shine:
Come, go along, and see me leave my breath,
And I'll leave thee upon the floor of death."

Cromwell leaves the stage for his execution with this speech:—

"*Exec.* I am your deathsman; pray, my lord, forgive me.

Crom. Even with my soul. Why, man, thou art my doctor,

And bring'st me precious physic for my soul.
My lord of Bedford, I desire of you
Before my death a corporal embrace.
Farewell, great lord; my love I do commend,
My heart to you; my soul to heaven I send.
This is my joy, that, ere my body fleet,
Your honour'd arms are my true winding-sheet.

Farewell, dear Bedford; my peace is made in heaven.

Thus falls great Cromwell, a poor ell in length,
To rise to unmeasured height, wing'd with new strength,

The land of worms, which dying men discover:
My soul is shrined with heaven's celestial cover."

It would be a waste of time to attempt to show that 'Thomas Lord Cromwell' could not have been written by Shakspeare. Its entire management is most unskilful; there is no art whatever in the dramatic conception of plot or character; from first to last there is scarcely a passage that can be called poetry; there is nothing in it that gives us a notion of a writer capable of better things; it has none of the faults of the founders of the stage,—false taste, extravagance, riches needlessly paraded. We are acquainted with no dramatic writer of mark or likelihood who was a contemporary of Shakspeare to whom it may be assigned. If W. S. were Wentworth Smith, it must have been unlucky for him in his own time that his initials might excite a comparison with the great master of the drama; however fortunate he may have been in having descended to after-times in the same volume (the third folio edition of Shakspeare) with ten historical plays that probably first stimulated his weak ambition.

CHAPTER IV.

KING EDWARD III.

'THE Raigne of King Edward the third: As it hath bin sundrie times plaied about the Citie of London,' was first published in 1596. It was entered on the registers of the Stationers' Company, December 1, 1595. The play was reprinted in 1599, and, judging from other entries in the Stationers' registers, also in 1609, 1617, and 1625. From that time the work was known only to the collectors of single plays, till, in 1760, Capell reprinted it in a volume entitled 'Prolusions, or Select Pieces of Ancient Poetry,' as "A play thought to be writ by Shakespeare." The editor of that volume thus speaks of the play in his preface:—"But what shall be said of the poem that constitutes the second part? or how shall the curiosity be satisfied which it is probable may have been raised by the great name inserted in the title-page? That it was indeed written by Shakespeare, it cannot be said with candour that there is any external evidence at all: something of proof arises from resemblance between the style of his earlier performances and the work in question; and a more conclusive one yet from consideration of the time it appeared in, in which there was no known writer equal to such a play: the fable of it too is taken from the same books which that author is known to have followed in some other plays, to wit, Holinshed's 'Chronicle,' and a book of novels called 'The Palace of Pleasure.' But, after all, it must be confessed that its being his work is conjecture only, and matter of opinion; and the reader must form one of his own, guided by what is now before him, and by what he shall meet with in perusal of the piece itself." Capell was not a person to offer any critical reasons for his own belief; but the opinions of several able critics in our own time would show that he was not to be laughed at, as Steevens was inclined to laugh at him, for rescuing this play from

the hands of the mere antiquarians*. An acute critic says, "Capell was the first who directed attention to this play, as perhaps Shakspeare's; and it is in every respect one of the best dramas of its time. It is very unequal, and its plot is unskilfully divided into two parts; but through most scenes there reign a pointed strength of thought and expression, a clear richness of imagery, and an apt though rough delineation of character, which entitle it to rank higher than any historical play of the sixteenth century, excepting Shakspeare's admitted works of this class, and Marlowe's 'Edward II.'"+ The opinion of Ulrici is very full and decided upon the authorship of 'Edward III.,' and we may as well present it at once to the reader in its general bearings.

"The play of 'Edward III. and the Black Prince,' &c., is entered not less than four times in the registers of the Stationers' Company; first, on December 1, 1595; and lastly, on February 23, 1625. It was first printed in 1596, and reprinted in 1599, both editions being without the name of the author. Of any later edition I have no knowledge. Both these early editions, being anonymous, can, however, prove nothing. But, even if the later editions were equally without the announcement of the author, this certainly rather striking fact may be satisfactorily explained by the nature of the piece itself. In the first two acts we find many bitter attacks upon the Scots, inspired by English patriotism: these were thoroughly in place during Elizabeth's lifetime, who, it is well known, loved her successor not much better than she did his mother, and ever stood in a guarded attitude against Scot-

* Steevens, in a note upon the entry in the Stationers' registers, says—"This is ascribed to Shakspeare by the compilers of ancient catalogues." This was one of the modes in which Steevens thought it clever to insult Capell by a contemptuous neglect.

† 'Edinburgh Review,' vol. lxxi. p. 471.

land. To James I., on the contrary, these passages must have given offence. But Shakspeare was indebted to James for many kindnesses; and he has praised and celebrated him in several of his plays. Thus, in order to avoid wounding his sense of gratitude, he may either have expressly denied the paternity of 'Edward III.,' or have refused to recognize it, and abandoned to its fate a piece that perhaps did not satisfy him upon other grounds. And in this way it may be also explained how a poem, which bears Shakspeare's stamp so evidently, should have been overlooked or intentionally omitted by his friends Heminge and Condell, the editors of the first folio. That the piece probably belongs to Shakspeare's earlier labours (without doubt two years at least before the date of its first being printed) is evident from the language and versification, from the many rhymed passages, but more particularly from the composition, which, if we consider the piece as one whole, is incontestably faulty. For the first two acts clearly stand alone much too independently; internally only partially united, and not at all externally, with the following three acts. In the first part the point of the action turns upon the love of the king for the beautiful Countess of Salisbury, whom he has released from the besieging Scottish army. The whole of this connection is no farther mentioned in the following part; it comes to a total conclusion at the end of the second act, where the king, conquered, and at the same time strengthened, by the virtuous greatness of the countess, renounces his passion, and becomes again the master of himself. The countess then disappears wholly from the scene, which is changed to the victorious campaign of Edward III. and his heroic son the Black Prince. The play thus falls into two different Parts. But the fault which this involves wholly vanishes immediately that we take the two halves for two different pieces, united into a whole, in the same manner as the two Parts of 'Henry IV.' Everything then rounds itself into a complete and beautiful historical composition, which is throughout worthy of the great poet."

Of the value of this opinion of the very able German critic before us we shall endeavour to lead our readers to form their own judgment. If they come to the conclusion that the play is not Shakspeare's, they will at least acquire a familiarity with some striking scenes and passages which are little known to English readers. The early editions are very rare; and Capell's volume is by no means a common book.

The view which Ulrici has taken that 'The Reign of Edward III.' must be considered as a play in two Parts is perfectly just. But it must also be borne in mind that Shakspeare has himself furnished us no example of such a complete division of the action in any *one* historical play which he has left us. The two Parts of 'Henry IV.' comprised two distinct plays, each complete in itself, each performed on a separate day, but each connected with the other by a chorus which fills up the gap of time. So the three Parts of 'Henry VI.' and 'Richard III.' are perfectly separate, although essentially connected. The plan pursued in the 'Edward III.' is, to say the least, exceedingly inartificial. If the writer of this play had possessed more dramatic skill, he might have made the severance of the action less abrupt. As it is, the link is snapped short. In the first two acts we have the Edward of romance,—a puling lover, a heartless seducer, a despot, and then a penitent. In the last three acts we have the Edward of history,—the ambitious hero, the stern conqueror, the affectionate husband, the confiding father. The one portion of the drama pretty closely follows the apocryphal and inconsistent story in 'The Palace of Pleasure,' how "A King of England loved a daughter of one of his noblemen, which was Countess of Salisbury." And here the author has certainly produced some powerful scenes, and considerably improved upon the fable which he in great part followed. In the latter portion of the play he has Froissart before him; and, dealing with those incidents which were calculated to call forth the highest poetical efforts, such as the battle of Poitiers and the siege of Calais, the dramatist is strikingly inferior to the fine old

chronicler. When Shakspeare dealt with heroic subjects, as in his 'Henry V.,' he kept pretty closely to the original narratives; but he breathed a life into the commonest occurrences, which leaves us to wonder how the exact could be so intimately blended with the poetical, and how that which is the most natural should, through the force of a few magical touches, become the most sublime. We do not trace this wonderful power in the play before us: talent there certainly is, but the great creative spirit is not visible.

The play opens with Robert of Artois explaining to Edward III. the claims which he has to the crown of France through his mother Isabelle. This finished, the Duke of Lorraine arrives to summon Edward to do homage to the King of France for the dukedom of Guienne. The scene altogether reminds us of the second scene of the first act of 'Henry V.,' where the Archbishop of Canterbury expounds the Salic law, and the ambassadors of France arrive with an insolent message to Henry from the Dauphin. The parallel scenes in both plays have some resemblance to the first scene of 'King John,' where Chatillon arrives with a message from France. It is probable that the 'Henry V.' of Shakspeare was not written till after this play of 'Edward III.:' and the 'King John,' as we now have it, might probably be even a later play: but the original 'King John,' in two Parts, belongs, without doubt, to an earlier period than the 'Edward III.,' and the same resemblance in this scene holds good with that play. Upon the departure of Lorraine, the rupture of the league with the Scots is announced to Edward, with the further news that the Countess of Salisbury is besieged in the castle of Roxburgh. The second scene shows us the countess upon the walls of the castle, and then King David of Scotland enters, and thus addresses himself to Lorraine:—

"Dav. My lord of Lorraine, to our brother
of France

Commend us, as the man in Christendom
Whom we most reverence and entirely love.
Touching your embassage, return, and say,
That we with England will not enter parley,
Nor never make fair weather, or take truce;

But burn their neighbour towns, and so persist

With eager roads beyond their city York.
And never shall our bonny riders rest;
Nor rusting canker have the time to eat
Their light-borne snaffles, nor their nimble
spurs;

Nor lay aside their jacks of gymold mail;
Nor hang their staves of grained Scottish ash
In peaceful wise upon their city walls;
Nor from their button'd tawny leathern belts
Dismiss their biting whinyards,—till your
king

Cry out 'Enough; spare England now for
pity.'

Farewell: and tell him, that you leave us
here

Before this castle; say, you came from us
Even when we had that yielded to our hands."

If this speech be not Shakspeare's, it is certainly a closer imitation of the freedom of his versification, and the truth and force of his imagery, than can be found in any of the historical plays of that period. We do not except even the 'Edward II.' of Marlowe, in which it would be difficult to find a passage in which the poetry is so little conventional as the lines which we have just quoted. And this brings us to the important consideration of the date of 'Edward III.' Ulrici holds that it was written at least two years before it was published. We cannot see the reason for this opinion. It was entered on the Stationers' registers on the 1st of December, 1595, and we have pretty good evidence in many cases that such entry was concurrent with the time of the original performance. If the 'Edward III.,' then, was first produced in 1595, there can be no doubt that Shakspeare's historical plays were already before the public—the 'Henry VI.,' and 'Richard III.,'—in all probability the 'Richard II.' Bearing this circumstance in mind, we can easily understand how a new school of writers should, in 1595, have been formed, possessing, perhaps, less original genius than some of the earlier founders of the drama, but having an immense advantage over them in the models which the greatest of those founders had produced. Still this consideration does not wholly war-

rant us in hastily pronouncing the play before us not to be Shakspeare's. As in the case of 'Arden of Feversham,' we have to look, and we look in vain, for some known writer of the period whose works exhibit a similar combination of excellences.

The Countess of Salisbury is speedily relieved from her besiegers by the arrival of Edward with his army. The king and the countess meet, and Edward becomes her guest. His position is a dangerous one, and he rushes into the danger. There is a very long and somewhat ambitious scene, in which the king instructs his secretary to describe his passion in verse. It is certainly not conceived in a real dramatic spirit. The action altogether flags, and the passion is very imperfectly developed in such an outpouring of words. The next scene, in which Edward avows his passion for the countess, is conceived and executed with far more success:—

Cou. Sorry I am to see my liege so sad:
What may thy subject do, to drive from thee
This gloomy consort, sullen melancholy?

Edw. Ah, lady, I am blunt, and cannot
straw
The flowers of solace in a ground of shame:—
Since I came hither, countess, I am wrong'd.

Cou. Now, God forbid, that any in my
house
Should think my sovereign wrong! Thrice
gentle king,
Acquaint me with your cause of discontent.

Edw. How near then shall I be to remedy?

Cou. As near, my liege, as all my woman's
power
Can pawn itself to buy thy remedy.

Edw. If thou speak'st true, then have I my
redress:
Engage thy power to redeem my joys,
And I am joyful, countess; else, I die.

Cou. I will, my liege.

Edw. Swear, countess, that thou wilt.

Cou. By heaven I will.

Edw. Then take thyself a little way aside;
And tell thyself a king doth dote on thee:
Say, that within thy power it doth lie
To make him happy; and that thou hast
sworn

To give me all the joy within thy power:
Do this, and tell me when I shall be happy.

Cou. All this is done, my thrice dread
sovereign:

That power of love, that I have power to give,
Thou hast with all devout obedience;
Employ me how thou wilt in proof thereof.

Edw. Thou hear'st me say that I do dote
on thee.

Cou. If on my beauty, take it if thou canst;
Though little, I do prize it ten times less:
If on my virtue, take it if thou canst;
For virtue's store by giving doth augment:
Be it on what it will, that I can give,
And thou canst take away, inherit it.

Edw. It is thy beauty that I would enjoy.

Cou. Oh, were it painted, I would wipe it off,
And dispossess myself, to give it thee:
But, sovereign, it is soldered to my life;
Take one, and both; for, like an humble
shadow,

It haunts the sunshine of my summer's life.

Edw. But thou mayst lend it me, to sport
withal.

Cou. As easy may my intellectual soul
Be lent away, and yet my body live,
As lend my body, palace to my soul,
Away from her, and yet retain my soul.
My body is her bower, her court, her abbey,
And she an angel, pure, divine, unspotted;
If I should lend her house, my lord, to thee,
I kill my poor soul, and my poor soul me."

The Earl of Warwick, father to the Countess of Salisbury, is required by Edward, upon his oath of duty, to go to his daughter, and command her to agree with his dishonourable proposals. This very unnatural and improbable incident is found in the story of 'The Palace of Pleasure;' but it gives occasion to a scene of very high merit—a little wordy, perhaps, but still upon the whole natural and effective. The skill with which the father is made to deliver the message of the king, and to appear to recommend a compliance with his demands, but so at the same time as to make the guilty purpose doubly abhorrent, indicates no common power:—

War. How shall I enter in this graceless
errand?

I must not call her child; for where's the
father

That will, in such a suit, seduce his child?

Then, Wife of Salisbury,—shall I so begin?

No, he's my friend; and where is found the friend

That will do friendship such endamage-
ment?
Neither my daughter, nor my dear friend's
wife.

I am not Warwick, as thou think'st I am,
But an attorney from the court of hell;
That thus have housed my spirit in his form,
To do a message to thee from the king.
The mighty king of England dotes on thee:
He, that hath power to take away thy life,
Hath power to take thine honour; then con-
sent

To pawn thine honour, rather than thy life;
Honour is often lost, and got again;
But life, once gone, hath no recovery.
The sun, that withers hay, doth nourish grass;
The king, that would distain thee, will advance
thee.

The poets write, that great Achilles' spear
Could heal the wound it made: the moral is,
What mighty men misdo, they can amend.
The lion doth become his bloody jaws,
And grace his foragement, by being mild
When vassal fear lies trembling at his feet.
The king will in his glory hide thy shame;
And those, that gaze on him to find out thee,
Will lose their eyesight, looking in the sun.
What can one drop of poison harm the sea,
Whose hugy vastures can digest the ill,
And make it lose his operation?

The king's great name will temper thy mis-
deeds,

And give the bitter potion of reproach
A sugar'd sweet and most delicious taste:
Besides, it is no harm to do the thing
Which without shame could not be left un-
done.

Thus have I, in his majesty's behalf,
Apparell'd sin in virtuous sentences,
And dwell upon thy answer in his suit.

Cou. Unnatural besiege! Woe me, unhappy,
To have escaped the danger of my foes,
And to be ten times worse invired by friends!
Hath he no means to stain my honest blood,
But to corrupt the author of my blood,
To be his scandalous and vile solicitor?
No marvel though the branches be infected,
When poison hath encompassed the root:
No marvel though the leprous infant die,
When the stern dam envenometh the dug.
Why, then, give sin a passport to offend,
And youth the dangerous rein of liberty:
Blot out the strict forbidding of the law;

And cancel every canon that prescribes
A shame for shame, or penance for offence.
No, let me die, if his too boist'rous will
Will have it so, before I will consent
To be an actor in his graceless lust.

War. Why, now thou speak'st as I would
have thee speak;

And mark how I unsay my words again.
An honourable grave is more esteem'd,
Than the polluted closet of a king:
The greater man, the greater is the thing,
Be it good, or bad, that he shall undertake:
An unrepented mote, flying in the sun,
Presents a greater substance than it is:
The freshest summer's day doth soonest taint
The loathed carrion that it seems to kiss:
Deep are the blows made with a mighty axe:
That sin doth ten times aggravate itself
That is committed in a holy place:
An evil deed, done by authority,
Is sin and subornation: Deck an ape
In tissue, and the beauty of the robe
Adds but the greater scorn unto the beast.
A spacious field of reasons could I urge
Between his glory, daughter, and thy shame:
That poison shows worst in a golden cup;
Dark night seems darker by the lightning
flash;

Lilies, that fester, smell far worse than weeds;
And every glory that inclines to sin,
The shame is treble by the opposite.
So leave I, with my blessing in thy bosom;
Which then convert to a most heavy curse,
When thou convert'st from honour's golden
name

To the black faction of bed-blotting shame!

[*Exit.*

Cou. I'll follow thee: And, when my mind
turns so,

My body sink my soul in endless woe! [*Exit.*"]

There is a line in the latter part of this
scene which is to be found also in one of
Shakspeare's Sonnets—the ninety-fourth:—

"Lilies, that fester, smell far worse than weeds."

We are of opinion that the line was original
in the sonnet, and transplanted thence into
this play. The point is material in con-
sidering the date of the sonnet, but it throws
no light either upon the date of this play or
upon its authorship.

During the tempest of Edward's passion,

the Prince of Wales arrives at the Castl of Roxburgh, and the conflict in the mind of the king is well imagined:—

Edw. I see the boy. Oh, how his mother's face,
Moulded in his, corrects my stray'd desire,
And rates my heart, and chides my thievish eye;
Who, being rich enough in seeing her,
Yet seeks elsewhere; and basest theft is that
Which cannot check itself on poverty.—
Now, boy, what news?

Pri. I have assembled, my dear lord and father,
The choicest buds of all our English blood,
For our affairs in France; and here we come,
To take direction from your majesty.

Edw. Still do I see in him delineate
His mother's visage; those his eyes are hers,
Who, looking wistly on me, made me blush;
For faults against themselves give evidence:
Lust is a fire; and men, like lanthorns, show
Light lust within themselves, even through
themselves.

Away, loose silks of wavering vanity!
Shall the large limit of fair Brittany
By me be overthrown? and shall I not
Master this little mansion of myself?
Give me an armour of eternal steel;
I go to conquer kings: And shall I then
Subdue myself, and be my enemy's friend?
It must not be.—Come, boy, forward, advance!
Let's with our colours sweep the air of France.

Lod. My liege, the countess, with a smiling cheer,
Desires access unto your majesty.

[*Advancing from the door, and whispering him.*]

Edw. Why, there it goes! that very smile
of hers
Hath ransom'd captive France; and set the
king,
The dauphin, and the peers, at liberty.—
Go, leave me, Ned, and revel with thy friends.
[*Exit Prince.*]

The countess enters, and with the following scene suddenly terminates the ill-starred passion of the king:—

Edw. Now, my soul's playfellow! art thou come,
To speak the more than heavenly word of yea,
To my objection in thy beauteous love?

Cou. My father on his blessing hath commanded—

Edw. That thou shalt yield to me.

Cou. Ay, dear my liege, your due.

Edw. And that, my dearest love, can be no less
Than right for right, and tender love for love.

Cou. Than wrong for wrong, and endless hate for hate.—

But,—sith I see your majesty so bent,
That my unwillingness, my husband's love,
Your high estate, nor no respect respected
Can be my help, but that your mightiness
Will overbear and awe these dear regards,—
I bind my discontent to my content,
And, what I would not, I'll compel I will;
Provided that yourself remove those lets
That stand between your highness' love and mine.

Edw. Name them, fair countess, and, by heaven, I will.

Cou. It is their lives, that stand between our love,
That I would have chok'd up, my sovereign.

Edw. Whose lives, my lady?

Cou. My thrice loving liege,
Your queen, and Salisbury my wedded husband;

Who living have that title in our love,
That we cannot bestow but by their death.

Edw. Thy opposition is beyond our law.

Cou. So is your desire: If the law
Can hinder you to execute the one,
Let it forbid you to attempt the other:
I cannot think you love me as you say,
Unless you do make good what you have sworn.

Edw. No more; thy husband and the queen shall die.

Fairer thou art by far than Hero was;
Beardless Leander not so strong as I:
He swom an easy current for his love:
But I will, through a helly spout of blood,
Arrive that Sestos where my Hero lies.

Cou. Nay, you'll do more; you'll make the river too,
With their heart-bloods that keep our love asunder,
Of which, my husband, and your wife, are twain.

Edw. Thy beauty makes them guilty of their death,
And gives in evidence, that they shall die;

Upon which verdict, I, their judge, condemn them.

Cou. O perjured beauty! more corrupted judge!

When, to the great star-chamber o'er our heads,

The universal sessions calls to count

This packing evil, we both shall tremble for it.

Edw. What says my fair love? is she resolute?

Cou. Resolute to be dissolved; and, therefore, this,—

Keep but thy word, great king, and I am thine.

Stand where thou dost, I'll part a little from thee,

And see how I will yield me to thy hands.

[Turning suddenly upon him, and showing two daggers.]

Here by my side do hang my wedding knives:
Take thou the one, and with it kill thy queen,

And learn by me to find her where she lies;

And with the other I'll despatch my love,

Which now lies fast asleep within my heart:

When they are gone, then I'll consent to love.

Stir not, lascivious king, to hinder me;

My resolution is more nimble far,

Than thy prevention can be in my rescue,

And, if thou stir, I strike; therefore stand still,

And hear the choice that I will put thee to:

Either swear to leave thy most unholy suit,

And never henceforth to solicit me;

Or else, by heaven *[kneeling]*, this sharp-pointed knife

Shall stain thy earth with that which thou wouldst stain,

My poor chaste blood. Swear, Edward, swear,

Or I will strike, and die, before thee here.

Edw. Even by that Power I swear, that gives me now

The power to be ashamed of myself,

I never mean to part my lips again

In any word that tends to such a suit.

Arise, true English lady; whom our isle

May better boast of, than e'er Roman might

Of her, whose ransack'd treasury hath task'd

The vain endeavour of so many pens:

Arise; and be my fault thy honour's fame,

Which after ages shall enrich thee with.

I am awaked from this idle dream."

The remarks of Ulrici upon this portion of the play are conceived upon his usual principle of connecting the action and characterization of Shakspeare's dramas with the development of a high moral, or rather Christian, principle. He is sometimes carried too far by his theory; but there is something far more satisfying in the criticism of his school than in the husks of antiquarianism with which we have been too long familiar:—"We see, in the first two acts, how the powerful king (who in his rude greatness, in his reckless iron energy, reminds us of the delineations of character in the elder 'King John,' 'Henry VI.,' and 'Richard III.') sinks down into the slough of common life before the virtue and faithfulness of a powerless woman; how he, suddenly enchained by an unworthy passion, abandons his great plans in order to write verses and spin intrigues. All human greatness, power, and splendour fall of themselves, if not planted upon the soil of genuine morality: the highest energies of mankind are not proof against the attacks of sin, when they are directed against the weak unguarded side—this is the substance of the view of life here taken, and it forms the basis of the first Part. But true energy is enabled again to elevate itself! it strengthens itself from the virtues of others, which by God's appointment are placed in opposition to it. With this faith, and with the highest, most masterly, deeply penetrating, and even sublime picture of the far greater energy of a woman, who, in order to save her own honour and that of her royal master, is ready to commit self-murder, the second act closes. This forms the transition to the following second Part, which shows us the true heroic greatness, acquired through self-conquest, not only in the king, but also in his justly celebrated son. For even the prince has also gone through the same school: he proves this, towards the end of the second act, by his quick silent obedience to the order of his father, although directly opposed to his wishes."

In the third act we are at once in the heart of war; we have the French camp, where John with his court hears of the

arrival of Edward's fleet, and the discomfiture of his own. The descriptions of these events are, as we think, tedious and overstrained; at any rate they are undramatic. The writer is endeavouring to put out his power, where the highest power would be wasted. There is less ambition, but much more force, in the following speech of a poor Frenchman who is flying before the invaders:—

“Fly, countrymen, and citizens of France !
Sweet-flow'ring peace, the root of happy life,
Is quite abandon'd and expulsed the land :
Instead of whom, ransack-constraining war
Sits like to ravens on your houses' tops ;
Slaughter and mischief walk within your
streets,

And, unrestrain'd, make havoc as they pass :
The form whereof even now myself beheld,
Now, upon this fair mountain, whence I came.
For, so far as I did direct mine eyes,
I might perceive five cities all on fire,
Corn-fields, and vineyards, burning like an
oven :

And, as the leaking vapour in the wind
Turned aside, I likewise might discern
The poor inhabitants, escaped the flame,
Fall numberless upon the soldiers' pikes :
Three ways these dreadful ministers of wrath
Do tread the measures of their tragic march ;
Upon the right hand comes the conquering
king,

Upon the left his hot unbridled son,
And in the midst our nation's glittering host ;
All which, though distant, yet conspire in
one
To leave a desolation where they come.”

Before the battle of Cressy we have an interview between the rival kings. The debate is not managed with any very great dignity on either side. Upon the retiring of John and his followers, the Prince of Wales is solemnly armed upon the field:—

“And, Ned, because this battle is the first
That ever yet thou fought'st in pitched field,
As ancient custom is of martialists,
To dub thee with the type of chivalry,
In solemn manner we will give thee arms.”

The famous incident of the battle of Cressy, that of the king refusing to send succour to his gallant son, is told by Froissart. The

dramatist has worked out this circumstance with remarkable spirit; it is, we think, the best business scene in the play—not overwrought, but simple, and therefore most effective*.

There is a fine scene where the Prince of Wales is surrounded by the French army before the battle of Poitiers; but it is something too prolonged and rhetorical; it has not the Shakspearean rush which belongs to such a situation. One specimen will suffice, where the prince exhorts his companion in arms, old Audley, to fly from the danger:—

“Now, Audley, sound those silver wings of
thine,

And let those milk-white messengers of time
Show thy time's learning in this dangerous
time :

Thyself art bruised and bent with many broils,
And stratagems forepast with iron pens
Are texed in thine honourable face ;
Thou art a married man in this distress,
But danger woos me as a blushing maid ;
Teach me an answer to this perilous time.

Aud. To die is all as common as to live ;
The one in choice, the other holds in chace ;
For, from the instant we begin to live,
We do pursue and hunt the time to die :
First bud we, then we blow, and after seed ;
Then presently we fall ; and, as a shade
Follows the body, so we follow death.

If then we hunt for death, why do we fear it ?
Or, if we fear it, why do we follow it ?
If we do fear, with fear we do but aid
The thing we fear to seize on us the sooner :
If we fear not, then no resolved proffer
Can overthrow the limit of our fate :
For, whether ripe or rotten, drop we shall,
As we do draw the lottery of our doom.

Pri. Ah, good old man, a thousand thou-
sand armours
These words of thine have buckled on my
back :

Ah, what an idiot hast thou made of life,
To seek the thing it fears ! and how disgraced
The imperial victory of murdering death !
Since all the lives his conquering arrows
strike

Seek him, and he not them, to shame his
glory.

* Of the historical portions of ‘Edward III.’ we shall have to give full extracts in the proposed volume of this series—‘The Dramatic History of England.’

I will not give a penny for a life,
Nor half a halfpenny to shun grim death;
Since for to live is but to seek to die,
And dying but beginning of new life:
Let come the hour when he that rules it will!
To live, or die, I hold indifferent."

The victory of Poitiers ensues; but, previous to the knowledge of this triumph, the celebrated scene of the surrender of Calais is dramatized. It appears to us very inferior, in the higher requisites of poetry, to the exquisite narrative of Froissart.

The concluding scene, in which the Prince of Wales offers up to the Most High a prayer and thanksgiving, is imbued with a patriotic spirit, but it has not the depth and discrimination of Shakspeare's patriotism:—

"Now, father, this petition Edward makes:
To Thee [*kneels*], whose grace hath been his
strongest shield,

That, as thy pleasure chose me for the man
To be the instrument to show thy power,
So thou wilt grant, that many princes more,
Bred and brought up within that little isle,
May still be famous for like victories!—
And, for my part, the bloody scars I bear,
The weary nights that I have watch'd in field,
The dangerous conflicts I have often had,
The fearful menaces were proffer'd me,
The heat, and cold, and what else might dis-
please,

I wish were now redoubled twenty-fold;
So that hereafter ages, when they read
The painful traffic of my tender youth,
Might thereby be inflamed with such resolve,
As not the territories of France alone,
But likewise Spain, Turkey, and what coun-
tries else

That justly would provoke fair England's ire,
Might, at their presence, tremble, and retire!"

We have thus presented to our readers some of the striking passages of this play. It does not, in our opinion, bear the marks

of being a very youthful performance of any man. Its great fault is tameness; the author does not rise with the elevation of his subject. To judge of its inferiority to the matured power of Shakspeare, dealing with a somewhat similar theme, it should be compared with the 'Henry V.' The question then should be asked, Will the possible difference of age account for this difference of power? We say possible, for we have no evidence that the 'Edward III.' was produced earlier than 1595, nor have we evidence that the 'Henry V.,' in some shape, was produced later. Ulrici considers that this play forms an essential introduction to that series of plays commencing with 'Richard II.' If Shakspeare wrote that wonderful series upon a plan which necessarily included 'Henry V.,' we think he would advisedly have omitted 'Edward III.;' for the main subject of the conquest of France would be included in each play. The concluding observation of Ulrici is—"Truly, if this piece, as the English critics assert, is not Shakspeare's own, it is a shame for them that they have done nothing to recover from forgetfulness the name of this second Shakspeare, this twin-brother of their great poet." Resting this opinion upon one play only, the expression "twin-brother" has somewhat an unnecessary strength. Admitting, which we do not, that the best scenes of this play display the same poetical power, though somewhat immature, which is found in Shakspeare's historical plays, there is one thing wanting to make the writer a "twin-brother," which is found in *all* those productions. Where is the *comedy* of 'Edward III.'? The heroic of Shakspeare's histories might be capable of imitation; but the genius which created Faulconbridge, and Cade, and Pistol, and Fluellen (Falstaff is out of the question) could not be approached.

CHAPTER V.

THE MERRY DEVIL OF EDMONTON.

'THE Merry Deuill of Edmonton: As it hath been sundry times acted by his Maiesties Servants, at the Globe on the Banke-side,' was originally published in 1608. Kirkman, a bookseller, first affixed Shakspeare's name to it in his catalogue. In 'The Companion to the Playhouse,' published in 1764, it is stated, upon the authority of a laborious antiquary, Thomas Coxeter, who died in 1747, to have been written by Michael Drayton; and in some posthumous papers of another diligent inquirer into literary history, Oldys, the same assertion is advanced. Charles Lamb, who speaks of this play with a warmth of admiration which is probably carried a little too far—and which, indeed, may in some degree be attributed to his familiarity with the quiet rural scenery of Enfield, Waltham, Cheshunt, and Edmonton, in which places the story is laid—says, "I wish it could be ascertained that Michael Drayton was the author of this piece: it would add a worthy appendage to the renown of that panegyrist of my native earth; who has gone over her soil (in his Polyolbion) with the fidelity of a herald, and the painful love of a son; who has not left a rivulet (so narrow that it may be stepped over) without honourable mention; and has animated hills and streams with life and passion above the dreams of old mythology."* 'The Merry Devil' was undoubtedly a play of great popularity. We find, from the account-books of the Revels at Court, that it was acted before the King in the same year, 1618, with 'Twelfth Night' and 'A Winter's Tale.' In 1616, Ben Jonson, in his Prologue to 'The Devil is an Ass,' thus addresses his audience:—

"If you'll come
To see new plays, pray you afford us room,
And show this but the same face you have
done
Your dear delight, 'The Devil of Edmonton.'

* 'Specimens of English Dramatic Poets.'

Its popularity seems to have lasted much longer: for it is mentioned by Edmund Gayton, in 1654, in his 'Notes on Don Quixote.'† The belief that the play was Shakspeare's has never taken any root in England. Some of the recent German critics, however, adopt it as his without any hesitation. Tieck has translated it; and he says that it undoubtedly is by Shakspeare, and must have been written about 1600. It has much of the tone, he thinks, of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' and "mine host of the George" and "mine host of the Garter" are alike. It is surprising that Tieck does not see that the one character is, in a great degree, an imitation of the other. Shakspeare, in the abundance of his riches, is not a poet who repeats himself. Horn declares that Shakspeare's authorship of 'The Merry Devil' is incontestable. Ulrici admits the bare possibility of its being a very youthful work of Shakspeare's. The great merit, on the contrary, of the best scenes of this play consists in their perfect finish. There is nothing careless about them; nothing that betrays the very young adventurer; the writer is a master of his art to the extent of his power. But that is not Shakspeare's power.

Fuller, in his 'Worthies,' thus records the merits of Peter Fabel, the hero of this play: "I shall probably offend the gravity of some to insert, and certainly curiosity of others to omit, him. Some make him a friar, others a lay gentleman, all a conceited person, who, with his merry devices, deceived the Devil, who by grace may be resisted, not deceived by wit. If a grave bishop in his sermon, speaking of Brute's coming into this land, said it was but a *bruit*, I hope I may say without offence that this Fabel was but a *fable*, supposed to live in the reign of King Henry the Sixth." His fame is more confidently recorded in the Prologue to 'The Merry Devil':—

† Collier's 'Annals of the Stage,' vol. iii. p. 417.

"T is Peter Fabel, a renowned scholar,
Whose fame hath still been hitherto forgot
By all the writers of this latter age.
In Middlesex his birth and his abode,
Not full seven miles from this great famous
city;
That, for his fame in sleights and magic won,
Was call'd the Merry Fiend of Edmonton.
If any here make doubt of such a name,
In Edmonton, yet fresh unto this day,
Fix'd in the wall of that old ancient church,
His monument remaineth to be seen :
His memory yet in the mouths of men,
That whilst he lived he could deceive the
devil."

The Prologue goes on to suppose him at
Cambridge at the hour when the term of his
compact with the fiend is run out. We are
not here to look for the terrible solemnity of
the similar scene in Marlowe's 'Faustus;' but,
nevertheless, that before us is written
with great poetical power. Coreb, the spirit,
thus addresses the magician :—

"Coreb. Why, scholar, this is the hour my
date expires ;

I must depart, and come to claim my due.

Fabel. Hah ! what is thy due ?

Coreb. Fabel, thyself.

Fabel. O let not darkness hear thee speak
that word,

Lest that with force it hurry hence amain,
And leave the world to look upon my woe :
Yet overwhelm me with this globe of earth,
And let a little sparrow with her bill
Take but so much as she can bear away,
That, every day thus losing of my load,
I may again, in time, yet hope to rise."

While the fiend sits down in the necromantic
chair, Fabel thus soliloquises :—

"Fabel. O that this soul, that cost so dear
a price

As the dear precious blood of her Redeemer,
Inspired with knowledge, should by that alone,
Which makes a man so mean unto the powers,
Ev'n lead him down into the depth of hell !

When men in their own praise strive to know
more

Than man should know !

For this alone God cast the angels down.

The infinity of arts is like a sea,

Into which when man will take in hand to
sail

Farther than reason (which should be his
pilot)

Hath skill to guide him, losing once his com-
pass,

He falleth to such deep and dangerous whirl-
pools,

As he doth lose the very sight of heaven :

The more he strives to come to quiet harbour,
The farther still he finds himself from land.

Man, striving still to find the depth of evil,
Seeking to be a God, becomes a devil."

But the magician has tricked the fiend ; the
chair holds him fast, and the condition of
release is a respite for seven years. The
supernatural part of the play may be said
here to end ; for, although throughout the
latter scenes there are some odd mistakes
produced by the devices of Fabel, they are
such as might have been accomplished by
human agency, and in fact appear to have
been so accomplished. Tieck observes, "It
is quite in Shakspeare's manner that the
magical part becomes nearly superfluous."
This, as it appears to us, is not in Shak-
spere's manner. In 'Hamlet,' in 'Macbeth,'
in 'The Midsummer Night's Dream,' in 'The
Tempest,' the magical or supernatural part
is so intimately allied with the whole action
that it impels the entire movement of the
piece. Shakspeare knew too well the sound-
ness of the Horatian maxim,—

"Nec Deus intersit nisi dignus vindice nodus,"—

to produce a ghost, a witch, or a fairy,
without necessity. However, the magical
part here finishes ; and we are introduced to
the society of no equivocal mortal, the host
of the George at Waltham. Sir Arthur
Clare, his wife Dorcas, his daughter Millisent,
and his son Harry, arrive at the inn, where
the host says, "Knights and lords have been
drunk in my house, I thank the destinies."
This company have arrived at the George to
meet Sir Richard Mounchensey, and his son
Raymond, to whom Millisent is betrothed ;
but old Clare informs his wife that he is
resolved to break off the match, to send his
daughter for a year to a nunnery, and then
to bestow her upon the son of Sir Ralph
Jerningham. Old Mounchensey, it seems,
has fallen upon evil days :—

"*Clare.* For look you, wife, the riotous old knight

Hath overrun his annual revenue,
In keeping jolly Christmas all the year :
The nostrils of his chimneys are still stuff'd
With smoke more chargeable than cane-to-
bacco;
His hawks devour his fattest hogs, whilst
simple,
His leanest curs eat his hounds' carrion.
Besides, I heard of late his younger brother,
A Turkey-merchant, hath sure suck'd the
knight,
By means of some great losses on the sea :
That (you conceive me) before God, all 's
nought,
His seat is weak; thus, each thing rightly
scann'd,
You'll see a flight, wife, shortly of his land."

Fabel, the kind magician, who has been the tutor to Raymond, arrives at the same time with the Mouchensey party. He knows the plots against his young friend, and he is determined to circumvent them:—

"Raymond Mouchensey, boy, have thou and I
Thus long at Cambridge read the liberal arts,
The metaphysics, magic, and those parts
Of the most secret deep philosophy?
Have I so many melancholy nights
Watched on the top of Peter-house highest
tower,
And come we back unto our native home,
For want of skill to loose the wench thou
lov'st?
We'll first hang Envil* in such rings of mist
As never rose from any dampish fen;
I'll make the brined sea to rise at Ware,
And drown the marshes unto Stratford-
bridge :
I'll drive the deer from Waltham in their
walks,
And scatter them, like sheep, in every field.
We may perhaps be crossed; but, if we be,
He shall cross the devil that but crosses me."

Harry Clare, Frank Jerningham, and Raymond Mouchensey are strict friends; and there is something exceedingly delightful in the manner in which Raymond throws away all suspicion, and the others resolve to stand

by their friend, whatever be the intrigues of their parents:—

"*Jern.* Raymond Mouchensey, now I touch thy grief

With the true feeling of a zealous friend.
And as for fair and beauteous Millisent,
With my vain breath I will not seek to
slubber

Her angel-like perfections: but thou know'st
That Essex hath the saint that I adore:

Where'er didst meet me, that we two were
jovial,

But like a wag thou hast not laugh'd at me,
And with regardless jesting mock'd my love?
How many a sad and weary summer's night
My sighs have drunk the dew from off the
earth,

And I have taught the nightingale to wake,
And from the meadows sprung the early lark
An hour before she should have list to sing:
I have loaded the poor minutes with my
moans,

That I have made the heavy slow-pac'd hours
To hang like heavy clogs upon the day.

But, dear Mouchensey, had not my affection
Seized on the beauty of another dame,
Before I'd wrong the chase, and leave the love
Of one so worthy, and so true a friend,
I will abjure both beauty and her sight,
And will in love become a counterfeit.

Moun. Dear Jerningham, thou hast begot
my life,
And from the mouth of hell, where now I
sate,

I feel my spirit rebound against the stars;
Thou hast conquer'd me, dear friend, in my
free soul,
There time, nor death, can by their power
control.

Fabel. Frank Jerningham, thou art a gallant
boy;

And, were he not my pupil, I would say,
He were as fine a metall'd gentleman,
Of as free spirit, and of as fine a temper,
As is in England; and he is a man
That very richly may deserve thy love.
But, noble Clare, this while of our discourse,
What may Mouchensey's honour to thyself
Exact upon the measure of thy grace?

Young Clare. Raymond Mouchensey, I
would have thee know,
He does not breathe this air, whose love I
cherish,

* Envil—Enfield.

And whose soul I love, more than Moun-
chensey's :

Nor ever in my life did see the man
Whom, for his wit and many virtuous parts,
I think more worthy of my sister's love.
But, since the matter grows unto this pass,
I must not seem to cross my father's will ;
But when thou list to visit her by night,
My horse is saddled, and the stable door
Stands ready for thee ; use them at thy plea-
sure.

In honest marriage wed her frankly, boy,
And if thou gett'st her, lad, God give thee joy.

Moun. Then, care away ! let fate my fall
pretend,

Back'd with the favours of so true a friend."

Charles Lamb, who gives the whole of this scene in his 'Specimens,' speaks of it rapturously:—"This scene has much of Shakspeare's manner in the sweetness and good-naturedness of it. It seems written to make the reader happy. Few of our dramatists or novelists have attended enough to this. They torture and wound us abundantly. They are economists only in delight. Nothing can be finer, more gentlemanlike, and noble, than the conversation and compliments of these young men. How delicious is Raymond Mouchensey's forgetting, in his fears, that Jerningham has a 'saint in Essex ;' and how sweetly his friend reminds him !"

The ancient plotters, Clare and Jerningham, are drawn as very politic but not over-wise fathers. There is, however, very little that is harsh or revolting in their natures. They put out their feelers of worldly cunning timidly, and they draw them in with considerable apprehension when they see danger and difficulty before them. All this is in harmony with the thorough good humour of the whole drama. The only person who is angry is Old Mouchensey:—

"*Clare.* I do not hold thy offer competent ;
Nor do I like the assurance of thy land,
The title is so brangled with thy debts.

Old Moun. Too good for thee : and, knight,
thou know'st it well,
I fawn'd not on thee for thy goods, not I,
'T was thine own motion ; that thy wife doth
know.

Lady Clare. Husband, it was so ; he lies
not in that.

Clare. Hold thy chat, quean.

Old Moun. To which I hearkened willingly,
and the rather,

Because I was persuaded it proceeded
From love thou borest to me and to my boy ;
And gavest him free access unto thy house,
Where he hath not behaved him to thy child
But as befits a gentleman to do :
Nor is my poor distressed state so low
That I'll shut up my doors, I warrant thee.

Clare. Let it suffice, Mouchensey, I mis-
like it ;

Nor think thy son a match fit for my child.

Old Moun. I tell thee, Clare, his blood is
good and clear

As the best drop that panteth in thy veins :
But for this maid, thy fair and virtuous child,
She is no more disparag'd by thy baseness,
Than the most orient and the precious jewel,
Which still retains his lustre and his beauty
Although a slave were owner of the same."

For his "frantic and untamed passion" Fabel reproves him. The comic scenes which now occur are exceedingly lively. If the wit is not of the highest order, there is real fun and very little coarseness. We are thrown into the midst of a jolly set, stealers of venison in Enfield Chase, of whom the leader is Sir John, the priest of Enfield. His humour consists of applying a somewhat pious sentence upon every occasion—"Hem, grass and hay—we are all mortal—let's live till we die, and be merry, and there's an end." Mine host of the George is an associate of this goodly fraternity. The comedy is not overloaded, and is very judiciously brought in to the relief of the main action. We have next the introduction of Millisent to the Prioress of Cheston (Cheshunt):—

"*Lady Clare.* Madam,
The love unto this holy sisterhood,
And our confirm'd opinion of your zeal,
Hath truly won us to bestow our child
Rather on this than any neighbouring cell.

Prioress. Jesus' daughter ! Mary's child !
Holy matron ! woman mild !
For thee a mass shall still be said,
Every sister drop a bead ;
And those again succeeding them
For you shall sing a requiem.

Sir Arthur. Madam, for a twelvemonth's
approbation,

We mean to make this trial of our child.
Your care, and our dear blessing, in mean
time,

We pray may prosper this intended work.

Prioress. May your happy soul be blithe,
That so truly pay your tithe:
He that many children gave,
'T is fit that he one child should have.
Then, fair virgin, hear my spell,
For I must your duty tell.

Millisent. Good men and true, stand to-
gether,
And hear your charge.

Prioress. First, a mornings take your book,
The glass wherein yourself must look;
Your young thoughts, so proud and jolly,
Must be turned to motions holy;
For your busk attires, and toys,
Have your thoughts on heavenly joys:
And for all your follies past
You must do penance, pray, and fast.
You must read the morning mass,
You must creep unto the cross,
Put cold ashes on your head,
Have a hair-cloth for your bed;
Bind your beads, and tell your needs,
Your holy aves, and your creeds:
Holy maid, this must be done,
If you mean to live a nun."

The sweetness of some of these lines argues the practised poet. Indeed the whole play is remarkable for its elegance rather than its force; and it appears to us exactly such a performance as was within the range of Drayton's powers. The device of Fabel proceeds, in the appearance of Raymond Mouchensey disguised as a friar. Sir Arthur Clare has disclosed to him all his projects. The "holy young novice" proceeds to the priory as a visitor sent from Waltham House to ascertain whether Millisent is about to take the veil "from conscience and devotion." The device succeeds, and the lovers are left together:—

"*Moun.* Life of my soul! bright angel!

Millisent. What means the friar?

Moun. O Millisent! 't is I.

Millisent. My heart misgives me; I should
know that voice.

You? who are you? the holy Virgin bless me!
Tell me your name; you shall ere you confess
me.

Moun. Mouchensey, thy true friend.

Millisent. My Raymond! my dear heart!
Sweet life, give leave to my distracted soul
To wake a little from this swoon of joy.
By what means camest thou to assume this
shape?

Moun. By means of Peter Fabel, my kind
tutor,

Who, in the habit of friar Hildersham,
Frank Jerningham's old friend and confessor,
Plotted by Frank, by Fabel, and myself,
And so deliver'd to Sir Arthur Clare,
Who brought me here unto the abbey-gate,
To be his nun-made daughter's visitor.

Millisent. You are all sweet traitors to my
poor old father.

O my dear life, I was a dream'd to-night,
That, as I was praying in my psalter,
There came a spirit unto me, as I kneel'd,
And by his strong persuasions tempted me
To leave this nunnery: and methought
He came in the most glorious angel shape
That mortal eye did ever look upon.
Ha! thou art sure that spirit, for there's no
form

Is in mine eye so glorious as thine own.

Moun. O thou idolatress, that dost this
worship

To him whose likeness is but praise of thee!
Thou bright unsetting star, which, through
this veil,

For very envy mak'st the sun look pale.

Millisent. Well, visitor, lest that perhaps
my mother

Should think the friar too strict in his de-
crees,

I this confess to my sweet ghostly father;
If chaste pure love be sin, I must confess
I have offended three years now with thee.

Moun. But do you yet repent you of the
same?

Millisent. I' faith I cannot.

Moun. Nor will I absolve thee
Of that sweet sin, though it be venial:
Yet have the penance of a thousand kisses;
And I enjoin you to this pilgrimage:—
That in the evening you bestow yourself
Here in the walk near to the willow-ground,
Where I'll be ready both with men and
horse

To wait your coming, and convey you hence
Unto a lodge I have in Enfield Chase:
No more reply if that you yield consent:
I see more eyes upon our stay are bent.

Millisent. Sweet life, farewell? 't is done,
let that suffice;
What my tongue fails, I send thee by mine
eyes."

The votaress is carried off by her brother and Jerningham; but in the darkness of the night they lose their way, and encounter the deer-stealers and the keepers. A friendly forester, however, assists them, and they reach Enfield in safety. Not so fortunate are Sir Arthur and Sir Ralph, who are in pursuit of the unwilling nun. They are roughly treated by the keepers, and, after a night of toil, find a resting-place at Waltham. The priest and his companions are terrified by their encounters in the Chase: the lady in white, who has been hiding from them, is taken for a spirit; and the sexton has seen a vision in the church-porch. The morning however arrives, and we see "Sir Arthur Clare and Sir Ralph Jerningham trussing their points, as newly up." They had made good their retreat, as they fancied, to the inn of mine host of the George, but the merry devil of Edmonton had set the host and the smith to change the sign of the house with that of another inn; and at the real George the lovers were being happily married by the venison-stealing priest, in the company of their faithful friends. Sir Arthur and Sir Ralph are of course very angry when the truth is made known; but reconciliation and peace are soon accomplished:—

"*Fabel.* To end this difference, know, at
first I knew
What you intended, ere your love took flight
From old Mouchensey: you, Sir Arthur
Clare,
Were minded to have married this sweet
beauty
To young Frank Jerningham. To cross this
match
I used some pretty sleights, but, I protest,

Such as but sat upon the skirts of art;
No conjurations, nor such weighty spells
As tie the soul to their performancy;
These, for his love who once was my dear
pupil,
Have I effected. Now, methinks, 't is strange
That you, being old in wisdom, should thus
knit
Your forehead on this match; since reason
fails,
No law can curb the lover's rash attempt;
Years, in resisting this, are sadly spent:
Smile then upon your daughter and kind son,
And let our toil to future ages prove,
The Devil of Edmonton did good in love.

Sir Arthur. Well, 't is in vain to cross the
providence:

Dear son, I take thee up into my heart;
Rise, daughter, this is a kind father's part.

Host. Why, Sir George, send for Spindle's
noise presently:

Ha! ere 't be night I'll serve the good Duke
of Norfolk.

Sir John. Grass and hay, mine host; let's
live till we die, and be merry, and there's an
end."

We lament with Tieck that the continuation of the career of 'The Merry Devil' is possibly lost. We imagine that we should have seen him expiating his fault by doing as much good to his fellow-mortals as he could accomplish without the aid of necromancy. Old Weever, in his 'Funeral Monuments,' has no great faith in his art magic: "Here (at Edmonton) lieth interred under a seemelie Tome, without Inscription, the Body of Peter Fabell (as the report goes) upon whom this Fable was fathered, that he by his wittie devises beguiled the devill: belike he was some ingenious conceited gentleman, who did use some sleighty trickes for his owne disports. He lived and died in the raigne of Henry the Seventh, saith the booke of his merry pranks."

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

AS YOU LIKE IT.

'As You Like It' was first printed in the folio collection of 1623.

The exact date of this comedy cannot be fixed, but there is no doubt that it belongs to the first or second year of the seventeenth century. It is not mentioned in the list published by Meres in 1598; and there is an allusion in the comedy which fixes the limits of its date in the other direction: "I will weep for nothing," says Rosalind, "like *Diana in the fountain*." The cross in Westcheap, originally erected by Edward I., was reconstructed in the reign of Henry VI., and converted to the useful purpose of a conduit. The images about the cross were often broken and defaced, probably by the misdirected zeal of the early reformers; and so the heathen deities were called in, and in 1596, according to Stow, was set up "an alabaster image of Diana, and water conveyed from the Thames prilling from her breast." Stow gives us this information in 1599; but in 1603, when the second edition of his 'Survey of London' was published, the glories of Diana were passed away; her fountain was no longer "prilling." "The same is oftentimes dried up, and now decayed," says Stow. There can be no doubt that Diana was included in the popular hatred of this unfortunate cross; for although Elizabeth, on the 24th September, 1600, sent a special command to the city respecting "the continuance of that monument," in accordance with which it was again repaired, gilded, and cleansed from dust, "about twelve nights following the image of our Lady was again defaced by plucking off her crown, and almost her head." When Rosalind made the allusion to *Diana in the fountain*, we may be pretty sure that the fountain was not "dried up."

If we were to accept the oracular decisions of Farmer and Steevens, as to the sources from which Shakspeare derived the story of 'As You Like It,' we might dismiss the subject very briefly. The one says, with his usual pedantic insolence, "'As You Like It' was certainly borrowed, if we believe Dr. Grey and Mr. Upton, from the 'Coke's Tale of Gamelyn,' which, by the way, was not printed till a century afterward, when, in truth, the old bard, who was no hunter of MSS., contented himself solely with Lodge's 'Rosalynd, or Euphues' Golden Legacye,' quarto, 1590."* Thus "the old bard," meaning Shakspeare, did not take the trouble of doing, or was incapable of doing, what another old bard, Lodge (first a player, and afterwards a naval surgeon), did with great care—consult the manuscript copy of an old English tale attributed, but supposed incorrectly so, to Chaucer. In spite, however, of Dr. Farmer, we shall take the liberty of looking at the 'Tale of Gamelyn,' in the endeavour to find some traces of Shakspeare. Steevens disposes of Lodge's 'Rosalynd' in as summary a way as Farmer does of 'Gamelyn.' "Shakespeare has followed Lodge's novel more exactly than is his general custom when he is indebted to such worthless originals, and has sketched some of his principal characters and borrowed a few expressions from it. The imitations, &c., however, are in general too insignificant to merit transcription." All this is very unscrupulous, ignorant, and tasteless. Lodge's 'Rosalynd' is *not* a worthless original; Shakspeare's imitations of it are *not* insignificant. Lodge's novel is, in many respects, however quaint and pedantic, informed with

* 'Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare, Boswell's Edition, p. 214.

a bright poetical spirit, and possesses a pastoral charm which may occasionally be compared with the best parts of Sydney's *'Arcadia.'* Lodge most scrupulously follows the *'Tale of Gamelyn,'* as far as that poem would harmonise with other parts of his story which we may consider to be his own invention. But he has added so much that is new, in the creation of the incident of the banished king, the adventures of Rosalynd and Alinda (Celia) in the forest, the passion of Rosader (Orlando), and the pretty mistake of Phebe arising out of the disguise of Rosalynd, that it is nothing less than absurd to consider Shakspeare's obligations to him as insignificant. It is remarkable that in the two instances where Shakspeare founded dramas upon the novels of two contemporary English writers, the *'Rosalynd'* of Lodge, and the *'Pandosto'* of Greene, he offered a decided homage to their genius, by adopting their incidents with great fidelity. But in the process of converting a narrative into a drama he manifests the wonderful superiority of his powers over those of the most gifted of his fellow-poets, even in a more remarkable way than if, using the common language of criticism, we might call the *'As You Like It'* and the *'Winter's Tale'* his own invention; especially in the exquisite taste with which he combines old materials with new, narrates what is unfit to be dramatically represented, represents what he finds narrated, informs the actors with the most lively and discriminating touches of character, and throws over the whole the rich light of his poetry and his philosophy. We believe that our readers will not, in this point of view consider the space ill bestowed which we shall devote to an analysis of Lodge's *'Rosalynd,'* as compared with the *'As You Like It.'* *

"The Coke's Tale of Gamelyn," says Tyrwhitt, "is not to be found in any of the MSS. of the first authority; and the manner,

* A reprint of this uncommonly rare tract forms part of a series entitled *'Shakespeare's Library, a Collection of the Romances, Novels, and Histories used by Shakespeare as the Foundation of his Dramas. Now first collected and accurately reprinted from the Original Editions, with Introductory Notices by J. Payne Collier, Esq., F.S.A.'* Such a work, so edited, is of the greatest value to the students and lovers of Shakspeare.

style, and versification, all prove it to have been the work of an author much inferior to Chaucer." He adds—"As a relique of our ancient poetry, and the foundation, perhaps, of Shakespeare's *'As You Like It,'* I could have wished to see it more accurately printed than it is in the only edition which we have of it."† Of the antiquity of the poem there can be no doubt. It not only employs the old language in the old spirit, but its conception of the heroic character is altogether that of a rude age, when deeds of violence did not present themselves to the imagination as any other than the natural accompaniments of bodily strength and undaunted courage. There is nothing more remarkable than the different modes in which Lodge and Shakspeare—who, be it remembered, were contemporaries, and therefore, with the exception of the differences of their individual habits of thought, to be supposed equally capable of modifying their impressions by the associations of a different state of society—have dealt with their common original. In the *'Tale of Gamelyn,'* an old doughty knight, Sir Johan of Boundis, is at the point of death, and directs certain "wise knights" to settle how he shall divide his goods amongst his three sons. The division which they make is, as we shall presently see, not agreeable to the wishes of the father, and he thus decrees that his land shall be divided otherwise than the friends had willed:—

"For Godd 'is love, my neighbouris,
Standeith ye allè still,
And I will delin my londe
After my ownè will.

Johan myn eldest sone shall
Yhavè plowis five,
That was my fadir's heritage
While that he was on live;

And middillist sonè shall
Five plowis have of lond
That I holpe for to gettin
With myn own rightè hond;

And all myn othir purchasis
Of landis and of ledes
That I bequethè Gamelyn
And all my gode stedes."

† Introductory Discourse to the *'Canterbury Tales.'*

According to Lodge's 'Rosalynd,' Sir John of Bourdeaux, in the presence of his fellow knights of Malta, calls his sons before him, and thus directs:—

"As I leave you some fading pelf to counter-check poverty, so I will bequeath you infallible precepts that shall lead you unto virtue. First, therefore, unto thee, Saladyne, the eldest, and therefore the chiefest pillar of my house, wherein should be engraved as well the excellency of thy father's qualities, as the essential fortune of his proportion, to thee I give fourteen ploughlands, with all my manor-houses and richest plate. Next, unto Fernandine I bequeath twelve ploughlands. But, unto Rosader, the youngest, I give my horse, my armour, and my lance, with sixteen ploughlands; for, if the inward thoughts be discovered by outward shadows, Rosader will exceed you all in bounty and honour."

The Orlando of Shakspeare thus describes his legacy:—

"As I remember, Adam, it was upon this fashion bequeathed me by will, but poor a thousand crowns; and, as thou say'st, charged my brother, on his blessing, to breed me well."

The entire difference of the conception of character between the Orlando of Shakspeare and the Rosader of Lodge follows this difference in the statement of the father's bequest. Shakspeare, we have no doubt, was led to this difference by his knowledge of the original tale. We do not believe that he "was no hunter of MSS." The mode in which the friends of the old doughty knight disposed of his wealth was this:—

"For to delin them al too on
That was ther only thought,
And for that Gamelyn yongist was
He shuldè havin nought."

We see at once that the course which Shakspeare has taken was necessary to his conception of the character of the younger brother. Because his brother neglected to breed him well, there begins his sadness:—

"My father charged you in his will to give me good education: you have trained me like a peasant, obscuring and hiding me from all gentlemanlike qualities: the spirit of my father grows strong in me, and I will no longer endure it:

therefore allow me such exercises as may become a gentleman, or give me the poor allottery my father left me by testament; with that I will go buy my fortunes."

With the exception of the slight burst of violence at the insolence of his elder brother, the youngest son of Shakspeare is perfectly submissive, unrepining at his fortunes, without revenge. In the 'Tale of Gamelyn,' and in Lodge's version of it, the youngest son being endowed more largely than his elder brother, there is a perpetual contest for power going forward. The elder brother is envious at the younger being preferred; the younger is indignant that the cunning of the elder deprives him of the advantages of his father's testament. It is singular how closely Lodge has here copied the old tale. In his preface he says,—

"Having, with Captain Clarke, made a voyage to the islands of Terceras and the Canaries, to beguile the time with labour I write this book; rough, as hatched in the storms of the ocean, and feathered in the surge of many perilous seas."

It is quite clear that he had in his cabin a copy in manuscript of the old 'Tale of Gamelyn.' For example:—

"Gamelyn stode upon a day
In his brotheris yerde,
And he began with his honde
To handilin his berde."

Compare Lodge:—

"With that, casting up his hand, he felt hair upon his face, and, perceiving his beard to bud, for choler he began to blush, and swore to himself he would be no more subject to such slavery."

Again:—

"After came his brothir in
Ywalkyng statelich thare,
And seidè unto Gamelyn
What? is our metè yare?
Tho Gamelyn ywrothid hym,
And swore by Goddis boke,
Thou shalt y go, bake, luke, thy self;
I wol not be thy coke."

The parallel passage in Lodge is as follows:—

"As thus he was ruminating of his melancholy passions, in came Saladyne with his men, and

seeing his brother in a brown study, and to forget his wonted reverence, thought to shake him out of his dumps thus. 'Sirrah,' quoth he, 'what, is your heart on your halfpenny, or are you saying a dirge for your father's soul? *what, is my dinner ready?*' At this question Rosader, turning his head askance, and bending his brows as if anger there had ploughed the furrows of her wrath, with his eyes full of fire, he made this reply: '*Dost thou ask me, Saladyne, for thy cates? ask some of thy churls who are fit for such an office.*'"

In the 'Tale of Gamelyn,' which continues to be almost literally followed by Lodge, we have now a terrible conflict between the two brothers. The elder calls his men to bind and beat; the younger seizes "a pestill," (Lodge calls it "a rake,")

"And droffe all his brother's men
Right sone on a hepe."

But there is a touch of nature in the old tale, equal in its pathos to the most beautiful things in our ancient ballads, which we look for in vain in Lodge, but which unquestionably entered into Shakspeare's conception of the generous and forgiving Orlando:—

"The knightè thoughtin on traison
But Gamelyn on none,
And went and kissid his brothir,
And then they were at one."

We are now arrived at the incident of the wrestling. In the old tale there is no treacherous agreement between the elder brother and the wrestler. The knight simply wishes that Gamelyn

"mightè brekin his nek
In that ilk wrestiling."

But in Lodge we have the incident which is dramatised in 'As You Like It,' Act I., Scene 1.

"Saladyne, hearing of this, thinking now not to let the ball fall to the ground, but to take opportunity by the forehead, first by secret means convented with the Norman, and procured him with rich rewards to swear that if Rosader came within his claws he would never more return to quarrel with Saladyne for his possessions."

But we turn again to the old tale, and we find that Shakspeare avails himself of whatever exists in that story suited for his dramatic object; although Lodge may have given a different version of it. With that care with which he distinguishes between what is necessary as a preparation for a dramatic incident, and the exhibition of another incident not essentially dramatic, he engages our sympathy for Orlando by narrating the triumph of the wrestler over the old man's three sons:—

"Yonder they lie; the poor old man, their father, making such *pitiful dole* over them, that all the beholders take his part with weeping."

When Gamelyn arrived at the wrestling-place, he lighted down from his steed and stood upon the grass;—

"And ther he herd a frankelyn
Weloway for to sing,
And beganin all bittirly
His handis for to wring."

Here we trace Shakspeare; in Lodge we lose him.

"At this unlooked-for massacre the people murmured, and were all in a deep passion of pity; but the franklin, father unto these, *never changed his countenance*, but as a man of courageous resolution took up the bodies of his sons without show of outward discontent."

Farther, in Lodge, when the champion approaches Rosader, he simply gives him *a shake by the shoulder*; in 'As You Like It' he mocks Orlando with taunting speeches; and so in Gamelyn he starts towards the youth,

"And seidè, Who is thy fadir,
And who is eke thy sire?
Forsothè thou art a gret fole,
For that thou camist hire."

Up to this point has Lodge followed his original, with few exceptions, very literally; but he now gives a new interest to the story by presenting to us Rosalynd. The style in which he describes her beauty is amongst the prettiest of poetical exaggerations:—

"The blush that gloried Luna, when she kissed the shepherd on the hills of Latmos, was not tainted with such a pleasant dye as the

vermilion flourished on the silver hue of Rosalynd's countenance: her eyes were like those lamps that make the wealthy covert of the heavens more gorgeous, sparkling favour and disdain; courteous and yet coy, as if in them Venus had placed all her amoretts, and Diana all her chastity. The trammels of her hair, folded in a caul of gold, so far surpassed the burnished glister of the metal as the sun doth the meanest star in brightness: the tresses that fold in the brows of Apollo were not half so rich to the sight, for in her hairs it seemed Love had laid herself in ambush, to entrap the proudest eye that durst gaze upon their excellence."

Mr. Collier, quoting this description of Lodge, says it "puts one a little in mind of James Shirley's excellent ridicule of overstrained hyperbolical compliments and unnatural resemblances, in his play of 'The Sisters'" (1652).^{*} We wonder Shakspeare's own playful sonnet did not occur to him as a closer example of this ridicule:—

"My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red:
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress
reeks.
I love to hear her speak,—yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a goddess go,—
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the
ground;
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare."

In this sonnet we see the dominant principle of good sense by which Shakspeare made his poetry a reality. His Rosalind is a living being, full of grace, and spirit, and tenderness; arch, witty, playful, impassioned. The Rosalynd of Lodge is not exactly "of no character at all," but she leaves no very distinct or pleasing impression on our mind. Shakspeare's exquisite conception of her character is in no place more clearly evinced than in the manner with which he deals

with an incident that Lodge thus presents to him:—

"As the king and lords graced him (Rosader) with embracing, so the ladies favoured him with their looks, especially Rosalynd, whom the beauty and valour of Rosader had already touched: but she accounted love a toy, and fancy a momentary passion; that, as it was taken in with a gaze, might be shaken off with a wink, and therefore feared not to dally in the flame; and, to make Rosader know she affected him, took from her neck a jewel, and sent it by a page to the young gentleman."

Compare this with the following delicious passage:—

"Ros. Gentleman,
[Giving him a chain from her neck.
Wear this for me; one out of suits with
fortune;
That could give more, but that her hand lacks
means.—
Shall we go, coz?
Cel. Ay:—Fare you well, fair
gentleman.
Orl. Can I not say, I thank you? My better
parts
Are all thrown down; and that which here
stands up
Is but a quintain, a mere lifeless block.
Ros. He calls us back: My pride fell with
my fortunes:
I'll ask him what he would:—Did you call,
sir?—
Sir, you have wrestled well, and overthrown
More than your enemies.
Cel. Will you go, coz?
Ros. Have with you:—Fare you well."

It is in Lodge that we find the story of an usurping king and a banished brother, of which there is nothing in Gamelyn. Lodge tells us of

"Torismond, the King of France, who, having by force banished Gerismond, their lawful king, that lived as an outlaw in the forest of Arden, sought now by all means to keep the French busied with all sports that might breed their content. Amongst the rest he had appointed this solemn tournament, whereunto he in most solemn manner resorted, accompanied with the twelve peers of France, who, rather for fear than

^{*} 'Poetical Decameron,' vol. ii. p. 171.

love, graced him with the show of their dutiful favours. To feed their eyes, and to make the beholders pleased with the sight of most rare and glistening objects, he had appointed his own daughter Alinda to be there, and the fair Rosalynd, daughter unto Gerismond, with all the beautiful damsels that were famous for their features in all France."

But after the tournament Lodge returns to his original; and we have a succession of contests of brute force between the younger and the elder brother, which Shakspeare altogether rejects. Rosader, upon returning home with a troop of young gentlemen, is shut out of the house by his brother's order; but he kicks down the door, breaks open the buttery, and revels with his companions till they have despatched five tuns of wine in his brother's cellar. This is literally the story of Gamelyn; which has, however, the pleasant accompaniment of the young gentleman breaking the porter's neck and throwing him into a well seven hundred fathoms deep. These events are followed, both in the old tale and the novel, by the elder brother chaining the younger to a post in the middle of his hall, where he continues two or three days without meat. The story thus proceeds:—

"Which Adam Spencer, the old servant of Sir John of Bourdeaux, seeing, touched with the duty and love he ought to his old master, felt a remorse in his conscience of his son's mishap; and therefore, although Saladyne had given a general charge to his servants that none of them upon pain of death should give either meat or drink to Rosader, yet Adam Spencer in the night rose secretly, and brought him such victuals as he could provide, and unlocked him, and set him at liberty."

It was in Gamelyn that Lodge found Adam Spencer:—

"Then seide at last this Gamelyn
That stodð boundin strong,
Adam Spencer, methinkith that
I fastè al to long."

Gamelyn being released, he and Adam Spencer effect a considerable slaughter of the elder brother's friends, in which particular Lodge nowise hesitates to follow his original.

Shakspeare has avoided all this; and he has given us instead one of the most delightful of all his scenes. It is said that he played the character of Adam himself. Oldys tells a story of a relation of the poet,—an old man who lived after the restoration of Charles II.,—describing "the faint, general, and almost lost ideas he had of having once seen him act a part in one of his own comedies, wherein being to personate a decrepit old man, he wore a long beard, and appeared so weak and drooping, and unable to walk, that he was forced to be supported and carried by another person to a table, at which he was seated among some company, who were eating, and one of them sung a song." This was unquestionably the Adam of 'As You Like It;' and to us there is no tradition of Shakspeare so pleasing as that in the following noble lines his lips uttered what his mind had conceived:—

"I have five hundred crowns,
The thrifty hire I saved under your father,
Which I did store, to be my foster nurse,
When service should in my old limbs lie lame,
And unregarded age in corners thrown;
Take that: and He that doth the ravens feed,
Yea, providently caters for the sparrow,
Be comfort to my age! Here is the gold;
All this I give you: Let me be your servant;
Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty:
For in my youth I never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood;
Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo
The means of weakness and debility;
Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
Frosty, but kindly: let me go with you;
I'll do the service of a younger man
In all your business and necessities."

The beauty of Rosalynd, according to Lodge's novel, filling all men with her praises, makes the usurping king resolved to banish her. Her cousin defends her; and the despot banishes them both. We need scarcely point out how judiciously Shakspeare has made Celia self-banished through her friendship. He has not varied the circumstances of their departure as related by Lodge:—

"Alinda grieved at nothing but that they might have no man in their company, saying, it would be their greatest prejudice in that two

women went wandering without either guide or attendant. Tush (quoth Rosalynd), art thou a woman, and hast not a sudden shift to prevent a misfortune? I, thou seest, am of a tall stature, and would very well become the person and apparel of a page: thou shalt be my mistress, and I will play the man so properly, that (trust me) in what company soever I come I will not be discovered. I will buy me a suit, and have my rapier very handsomely at my side, and, if any knave offer wrong, your page will show him the point of his weapon. At this Alinda smiled, and upon this they agreed, and presently gathered up all their jewels, which they trussed up in a casket, and Rosalynd in all haste provided her of robes; and Alinda being called Aliena, and Rosalynd Ganimede, they travelled along the vineyards, and by many by-ways at last got to the forest side, where they travelled by the space of two or three days without seeing any creature, being often in danger of wild beasts, and pained with many passionate sorrows."

But where is Touchstone? We find him not in Lodge. Steevens tells us, "the characters of Jaques, the Clown, and Audrey, are entirely of the poet's own formation."

"Ay, now am I in Arden!" Touchstone thought that when he was at home he was in a better place. But *here is* the home of every true lover of poetry. What a world of exquisite images do Shakspeare's pictures of this forest call up! He gives us no positive set descriptions, of trees, and flowers, and rivulets, and fountains,—such as we may cut out and paste into an album. But a touch here and there carries us into the heart of his living scenery. And so, whenever it is our happy lot to be wandering

"Under the shade of melancholy boughs,"
we think of the oak beneath which Jaques lay along,—

"whose antique root peeps out
Upon the brook that brawls along this wood;"
and of the dingle where Touchstone was with Audrey and her goats; and of the

"Sheepcote fenced about with olive-trees,"
where dwelt Rosalind and Celia; and of the hawthorns and brambles upon which Orlando

hung odes and elegies. The description which Lodge gives us of Arden leaves no such impression; it is cold and classical, vague and elaborate:—

"With that they rose up, and marched forward till towards the even, and then coming into a fair valley (compassed with mountains, whereon grew many pleasant shrubs) they descried where two flocks of sheep did feed. Then, looking about, they might perceive where an old shepherd sat (and with him a young swain) under a covert most pleasantly situated. The ground where they sat was diapered with Flora's riches, as if she meant to wrap Tellus in the glory of her vestments: round about, in the form of an amphitheatre, were most curiously planted pine-trees, interseamed with lemons and citrons, which with the thickness of their boughs so shadowed the place, that Phœbus could not pry into the secret of that arbour; so united were the tops with so thick a closure that Venus might there in her jollity have dallied unseen with her dearest paramour. Fast by (to make the place more gorgeous) was there a fount so crystalline and clear, that it seemed Diana with her Dryades and Hamadryades had that spring, as the secret of all their bathings. In this glorious arbour sat these two shepherds (seeing their sheep feed) playing on their pipes many pleasant tunes, and from music and melody falling into much amorous chat."

Nothing can more truly show how immeasurably superior was the art of Shakspeare to the art of other poets than the comparison of such a description as this of Lodge with the incidental scene-painting of *his* forest of Arden. It has been truly and beautifully said of Shakspeare,—“All his excellences, like those of Nature herself, are thrown out together; and, instead of interfering with, support and recommend, each other. His flowers are not tied up in garlands, nor his fruits crushed into baskets—but spring living from the soil, in all the dew and freshness of youth.”* But there are critics of another caste, who object to Shakspeare's forest of Arden, situated, as they hold, “between the rivers Meuse and Moselle.” They maintain that its geographical position ought to have been known by Shakspeare; and that he is

* ‘Edinburgh Review,’ vol. xxviii.

consequently most vehemently to be reprehended for imagining that a palm-tree could flourish, and a lioness be starving, in French Flanders. We most heartily wish that the critics would allow poetry to have its own geography. We do *not* want to know that Bohemia has no seaboard; we do *not* wish to have the island of Sycorax defined on the map; we do *not* require that our forest of Arden should be the *Arduenna Sylva* of Cæsar and Tacitus, and that its rocks should be "clay-slate, grauwacke-slate, grauwacke, conglomerate, quartz-rock, and quartzose sandstone." We are quite sure that Ariosto was thinking nothing of French Flanders when he described how

"two fountains grew,
Like in the taste, but in effects unlike,
Placed in *Ardenna*, each in other's view:
Who tastes the one, love's dart his heart doth
strike;
Contrary of the other doth ensue,
Who drinks thereof, their lovers shall mis-
like."*

We are equally sure that Shakspeare *meant* to take his forest out of the region of the literal, when he assigned to it a palm-tree and a lioness. Lady Morgan tells us, "The forest of Ardennes smells of early English poetry. It has all the greenwood freshness of Shakspeare's scenes; and it is scarcely possible to feel the truth and beauty of his exquisite 'As You Like It,' without having loitered, as I have done, amidst its tangled glens and magnificent depths."† We must venture to think that it was not necessary for Shakspeare to visit the Ardennes to have described

"An old oak, whose boughs were moss'd with
age,
And high top bald with dry antiquity;"

and that, although his own Warwickshire Arden is now populous, and we no longer meet there a "desert inaccessible," there are fifty places in England where, with the *As You Like It* in hand, one might linger

* 'Orlando Furioso,' book i., stanza 78, Harrington's Translation.

† 'The Princess,' a novel, vol. iii. p. 207.

"from noon to dewy eve," and say, "Ay, now am I in Arden."

Shakspeare, as it appears to us, has not only taken the geography of his Arden out of the real, but has in the same way purposely perplexed the chronology of his comedy. In Lodge's 'Rosalynd' the geography is somewhat *more* perplexed; for it is minute enough to belong apparently to the real, while it is essentially untrue. Adam and Rosader travel from Bordeaux to the forest of Arden: "Rosader and Adam, knowing full well the secret ways that led through the vineyards, stole away privily through the province of Bordeaux, and escaped safe to the forest of Arden." Secret or public, the ways must have been sufficiently wearisome which led completely across France from the Garonne to the Meuse. This is one of the many examples of the disregard of exactness which we find in Shakspeare's contemporaries. But here the inexactness looks only like a blunder: in Shakspeare's forest of Arden we have nothing definite, and therefore we readily pass into the imaginative. In the same way, Lodge presents us with King Gerismond and King Torismond, kings of France. Shakspeare idealises these persons into *dukes*. We thus are thrown out of the limits of real history, unless we strain a point to come within those limits. We grant that this idealising is very perplexing to the stage representation of this and other plays; but it must be remembered that this perplexity arises from the altered condition of the stage itself. Its scenes must *now* be copied from nature; its dresses must *now* be true to a quarter of a century in the doublet and the hose. We do not object to this *in its place*; and we hold that *when* the poet deals with the real it is our duty to follow him with the minutest scrupulosity. But with the same reverence for his guidance we maintain that, when he proclaims by tokens not to be mistaken that he has entered the regions of imagination, we are not to take him out of those regions and surround him with the boundaries of time and space. The view which Ulrici takes of the extent to which the ideal prevails in 'As You Like It' has our

perfect concurrence:—"Separately, nothing appears directly opposed to reality: no *super-natural*, or *un-natural*, beings or appearances. *Separately*, every character, situation, and incident, might belong to common actuality; it is only through the lions and serpents in a European forest that it is lightly indicated to us that we tread the soil of poetic fancy. And yet more distinctly does the entire play in its development,—the involutions and proportion of the parts to the whole,—the oneness of the relations and situations, the actions and circumstances,—render it clear that this drama is by no means intended as a representation of common actuality; but rather of life as seen from a peculiar and poetical point of view."

We have already said that the deviations which Shakspeare made in the conduct of his story, from the original presented to him in Lodge's 'Rosalynd,' furnish a most remarkable example of the wonderful superiority of his art as compared with the art of other men. But the *additions* which he has made to the story of 'Rosalynd' evince even a higher power: they grow out of his surpassing philosophy. To this quality Lodge sets up no pretensions. When the younger brother of the novelist has fled from his home with his faithful servant—when his Rosalynd and Alinda have been banished from the court—they each enter into the pastoral life with all imaginable prettiness; and there in the forest wild they encounter *native* pastoral lovers, and a dethroned king and his free companions leading the hunter's life without care or retrospection. Alinda and Rosalynd have now become Aliena and Ganymede; and when they sojourn in the forest they find the verses of despairing shepherds graven upon tall beech-trees, and hear interminable eclogues recited between Montanus and Coridon. How closely Shakspeare follows the *incidents* of his original may be gathered from the address of Lodge's Aliena to one of these poetical swains:—

"Therefore let this suffice, gentle shepherd: my distress is as great as my travail is dangerous, and I wander in this forest to light on some cottage where I and my page may dwell: for I mean to buy some farm, and a flock of sheep,

and so become a shepherdess, meaning to live low, and content me with a country life; for I have heard the swains say that they drank without suspicion, and slept without care. Marry, mistress, quoth Coridon, if you mean so, you came in good time, for my landlord intends to sell both the farm I till and the flock I keep, and cheap you may have them for ready money: and for a shepherd's life (oh, mistress!) did you but live awhile in their content, you would say the court were rather a place of sorrow than of solace. Here, mistress, shall not fortune thwart you, but in mean misfortunes, as the loss of a few sheep, which, as it breeds no beggary, so it can be no extreme prejudice: the next year may mend all with a fresh increase. Envy stirs not us, we covet not to climb, our desires mount not above our degrees, nor our thoughts above our fortunes. Care cannot harbour in our cottages, nor do our homely couches know broken slumbers: as we exceed not in diet, so we have enough to satisfy; and, mistress, I have so much Latin, *satis est quod sufficit*.

"By my truth, shepherd (quoth Aliena), thou makest me in love with your country life, and therefore send for thy landlord, and I will buy thy farm and thy flocks, and thou shalt still under me be overseer of them both: only for pleasure sake I and my page will serve you, lead the flocks to the field, and fold them. Thus will I live quiet, unknown, and contented."

Again, when Rosader and Adam enter the forest, and in their extremity of distress encounter the merry company of banished courtiers, we have the exact prototype of the *action* of Orlando and Adam of Shakspeare:—

"Rosader, full of courage (though very faint), rose up, and wished A. Spencer to sit there till his return; 'for my mind gives me,' quoth he, 'I shall bring thee meat.' With that, like a mad-man, he rose up, and ranged up and down the woods, seeking to encounter some wild beast with his rapier, that either he might carry his friend Adam food, or else pledge his life in pawn for his loyalty. It chanced that day that Gerismond, the lawful King of France, banished by Torismond, who with a lusty crew of outlaws lived in that forest, that day in honour of his birth made a feast to all his bold yeomen, and frolicked it with store of wine and venison, sitting all at a long table under the shadow of lemon-trees. To that place by chance fortune

conducted Rosader, who seeing such a crew of brave men, having store of that for want of which he and Adam perished, he stepped boldly to the board's end, and saluted the company thus:—

“Whatsoever thou be that art master of these lusty squires, I salute thee as graciously as a man in extreme distress may: know that I and a fellow friend of mine are here famished in the forest for want of food: perish we must, unless relieved by thy favours. Therefore, if thou be a gentleman, give meat to men, and to such as are every way worthy of life. Let the proudest squire that sits at thy table rise and encounter with me in any honourable point of activity whatsoever, and if he and thou prove me not a man, send me away comfortless. If thou refuse this, as a niggard of thy cates, I will have amongst you with my sword; for rather will I die valiantly, than perish with so cowardly an extreme. Gerismond,* looking him earnestly in the face, and seeing so proper a gentleman in so bitter a passion, was moved with so great pity, that, rising from the table, he took him by the hand and bade him welcome, willing him to sit down in his place, and in his room not only to eat his fill, but be lord of the feast. ‘Gramercy, sir,’ quoth Rosader, ‘but I have a feeble friend that lies hereby famished almost for food, aged, and therefore less able to abide the extremity of hunger than myself, and dishonour it were for me to taste one crumb before I made him partner of my fortunes: therefore I will run and fetch him, and then I will gratefully accept of your proffer.’ Away hies Rosader to Adam Spencer, and tells him the news, who was glad of so happy fortune, but so feeble he was that he could not go; whereupon Rosader got him up on his back, and brought him to the place.”

Exact, also, is the resemblance between the Rosader of Lodge, wandering about and carving on a tree “a pretty estimate of his mistress’s perfections,” and the Orlando of Shakspeare, who in the same manner records

“The fair, the chaste, and unexpressive she.”

Literal is the copy, too, we have in Shakspeare of the *situations* of the lovers when Rosalind passes with Orlando as the merry page:—

“As soon as they had taken their repast, Rosader, giving them thanks for his good cheer, would have been gone; but Ganymede, that was

loth to let him pass out of her presence, began thus:—‘Nay, forester,’ quoth she, ‘if thy business be not the greater, seeing thou sayest thou art so deeply in love, let me see how thou canst woo. I will represent Rosalynd, and thou shalt be as thou art, Rosader. See in some amorous eclogue, how if Rosalynd were present, how thou couldst court her; and while we sing of love Aliena shall tune her pipe and play us melody.’ ‘Content,’ quoth Rosader; and Aliena, she, to show her willingness, drew forth a recorder, and began to wind it.”

Far different, however, is the *characterisation* arising out of these similar circumstances. Lodge gives us a “wooing eclogue betwixt Rosalynd and Rosader;” wherein the *lover* thus swears in the good heroic vein:—

“First let the heavens conspire to pull me down,
And heaven and earth as abject quite refuse me;
Let sorrows stream about my hateful bower,
And retchless horror hatch within my breast;
Let beauty’s eye afflict me with a lower,
Let deep despair pursue me without rest,
Ere Rosalynd my loyalty disprove,
Ere Rosalynd accuse me for unkind.”

The *beloved* of Shakspeare uses no such holiday vows; but is contented with, “By my troth, and in good earnest, and so God mend me, and by all pretty oaths that are not dangerous.” It is the wit and vivacity of Rosalind, opposed to the poetical earnestness of Orlando, that prevents the pastoral from sliding into the ridiculous, as it has always a tendency to do. The same art is again shown in the management of the incident of Phebe’s love for Ganymede. Lodge thus presents it to us:—

“Ganymede, overhearing all these passions of Montanus, could not brook the cruelty of Phebe, but, starting from behind a bush, said, ‘And if, damsel, you fled from me, I would transform you as Daphne to a bay, and then in contempt trample your branches under my feet.’ Phebe, at this sudden reply, was amazed, especially when she saw so fair a swain as Ganymede; blushing, therefore, she would have home gone, but that he held her by the hand, and prosecuted his reply thus: ‘What, shepherdess, so fair and so cruel? Disdain beseems not cottages, nor coyness maids; for either they be condemned

to be too proud, or too froward. Take heed, fair nymph, that in despising love you be not overreached with love, and, in shaking off all, shape yourself to your own shadow, and so with Narcissus prove passionate and yet unpitied. Oft have I heard, and sometime have I seen, high disdain turned to hot desires. Because thou art beautiful be not so coy: as there is nothing more fair, so there is nothing more fading: as momentary as the shadows which grow from a cloudy sun. Such, my fair shepherdess, as disdain in youth, desire in age, and then they are hated in the winter that might have been loved in the prime. A wrinkled maid is like to a parched rose, that is cast up in coffers to please the smell, not worn in the hand to content the eye. There is no folly in love to—had I wist? and therefore be ruled by me, love while thou art young, lest thou be disdained when thou art old. Beauty nor time cannot be recalled, and if thou love, like of Montanus; for, if his desires are many, so his deserts are great.

"Phebe all this while gazed on the perfection of Ganymede, as deeply enamoured of his perfection as Montanus inveigled with hers: for her eye made survey of his excellent feature, which she found so rare, that she thought the ghost of Adonis had leaped from Elysium in the shape of a swain."

Compare this with the fifth scene of the third act of 'As You Like It:—

"Why, what means this? Why do you look on me?

I see no more in you, than in the ordinary
Of nature's sale-work:—Od's my little life!

I think, she means to tangle my eyes too:—

No, 'faith, proud mistress, hope not after it;

'T is not your inky brows, your black silk
hair,

Your bugle eyeballs, nor your cheek of cream,
That can entame my spirits to your worship.—

You foolish shepherd, wherefore do you follow
her?

Like foggy south, puffing with wind and rain?

You are a thousand times a properer man,

Than she a woman: 'T is such fools as you

That make the world full of ill-favoured
children:

'T is not her glass, but you, that flatters her;

And out of you she sees herself more proper,

Than any of her lineaments can show her;—

But, mistress, know yourself; down on your
knees,

And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's
love."

It is unnecessary for us to pursue this parallel farther. Shakspeare follows Lodge, with scarcely a deviation, *in the conduct of his story*. We have the same incidents of the elder brother's exile,—his rescue from a savage beast by the courage of the brother he had injured,—and his passion for the banished daughter of the usurping king. We have, of course, the same discovery of Rosalind to her father, and the same happy marriage of the princesses with their lovers, as well as that of the coy shepherdess with her shepherd. The catastrophe, however, is different. The usurping king of Lodge comes out with a mighty army to fight his rebellious peers,—when the sojourners in the forest join the battle, the usurper is slain, and the rightful king restored. Shakspeare manages the matter after a milder fashion:—

"Duke Frederick, hearing how that every day
Men of great worth resorted to this forest,
Address'd a mighty power; which were on
foot,

In his own conduct, purposely to take

His brother here, and put him to the sword:

And to the skirts of this wild wood he came;

Where, meeting with an old religious man,

After some question with him, was converted

Both from his enterprise, and from the world:

His crown bequeathing to his banish'd brother,

And all their lands restored to them again

That were with him exiled."

Dr. Johnson does not entirely disapprove of this arrangement; but he thinks that Shakspeare lost a fit occasion for a serious discourse: "By hastening to the end of this work, Shakspeare suppressed the dialogue between the usurper and the hermit, and lost an opportunity of exhibiting a moral lesson in which he might have found matter worthy of his highest powers." Shakspeare, we venture to imagine, hastened to the end of his work, as his work was naturally approaching its conclusion. His philosophy, according to his usual practice, accompanies his action; and he does not reserve his moral till the end. To him it can never be objected,

"What tedious homily have you wearied your parishioners withal, and never cried, Have patience, good people!" His "moral lesson" is to be collected out of his incidents and his characters. Perhaps there is no play more full of real moral lessons than 'As You Like It.' What in Lodge was a pastoral replete with quaintness, and antithesis, and pedantry, and striving after effect, becomes in Shakspeare an imaginative drama, in which the real is blended with the poetical in such intimate union, that the highest poetry appears to be as essentially natural as the most familiar gossip; and the loftiest philosophy is interwoven with the occurrences of every-day life, so as to teach us that there is a philosophical aspect of the commonest things. It is this spirit which informs *his* forest of Arden with such life, and truth, and beauty, as belongs to no other representation of pastoral scenes; which takes us into the depths of solitude, and shows us how the feelings of social life alone can give us

"tongues in trees, books in the running
brooks,

Sermons in stones, and good in everything;" which builds a throne for intellect "under the greenwood tree," and there, by *characteristic* satire, gently indicates to us the vanity of the things that bind us to the *world*; whilst it teaches us that *life* has its happiness in the cultivation of the affections,—in content and independence of spirit. It was by a process such as this that the novel of Lodge was changed into the comedy of Shakspeare. The amalgamation of Jaques and Touchstone with Orlando and Rosalind is one of the most wonderful efforts of originality in the whole compass of poetical creation.

Of all Shakspeare's comedies we are inclined to think that 'As You Like It' is the most *read*. It possesses not the deep tragic interest of 'The Merchant of Venice,' nor the brilliant wit and diverting humour of 'Much Ado about Nothing,' nor the prodigal luxuriance of fancy which belongs to 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' nor the wild legendary romance which imparts its charm to 'A Winter's Tale,' nor the grandeur of the poetical creation of 'The Tempest.' The

peculiar attraction of 'As You Like It' lies, perhaps, in the circumstance that "in no other play do we find the bright imagination and fascinating grace of Shakspeare's youth so mingled with the thoughtfulness of his maturer age." This is the character which Mr. Hallam gives of this comedy, and it appears to us a very just one*. But in another place Mr. Hallam says, "There seems to have been a period of Shakspeare's life when his heart was ill at ease and ill content with the world or his own conscience. The memory of hours misspent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man's worser nature, which intercourse with ill-chosen associates, by chance or circumstances, peculiarly teaches;—these, as they sank down into the depths of his great mind, seem not only to have inspired into it the conception of 'Lear' and 'Timon,' but that of one primary character, the censurer of mankind. *This type is first seen in the philosophic melancholy of Jaques*, gazing with an undiminished serenity, and with a gaiety of fancy though not of manners, on the follies of the world. It assumes a graver cast in the exiled Duke of the same play." Mr. Hallam then notices the like type in 'Measure for Measure,' and the altered 'Hamlet,' as well as in 'Lear' and 'Timon;' and adds, "In the later plays of Shakspeare, especially in 'Macbeth' and 'The Tempest,' much of moral speculation will be found, but he has never returned to this type of character in the personages."† Without entering into a general examination of Mr. Hallam's theory, which evidently includes a very wide range of discussion, we must venture to think that the type of character *first* seen in Jaques, and presenting a graver cast in the exiled Duke, is so modified by the whole conduct of the action of this comedy, by its opposite characterisation, and by its prevailing tone of reflection, that it offers not the slightest evidence of having been produced at a period of the poet's life "when his heart was ill at ease and ill content with the world or his own conscience." The charm which this play appears to us to possess in a most

* 'Literature of Europe,' vol. ii. p. 397.

† *Ib.*, vol. iii. p. 568.

remarkable degree, even when compared with other works of Shakspeare, is that, while we behold "the philosophic eye, turned inward on the mysteries of human nature"—(we use Mr. Hallam's own forcible expression)—we also see the serene brow and the playful smile, which tell us that "the philosophic eye" belongs to one who, however above us, is still akin to us—who tolerates our follies, who compassionates even our faults, who mingles in our gaiety, who rejoices in our happiness; who leads us to scenes of surpassing loveliness, where we may forget the painful lessons of the world, and introduces us to characters whose generosity, and faithfulness, and affection, and simplicity may obliterate the sorrows of our "experience of man's worser nature." It is not in Jaques alone, but in the entire dramatic group, that we must seek the tone of the poet's mind, and to that have our own minds attuned. Mr. Campbell, speaking of the characters of this comedy, says, "Our hearts are so stricken by these *benevolent* beings that we easily forgive the other more culpable but at last repentant characters."* This is not the effect which could have been produced if the dark shades of a painful commerce with the world had crossed that "sunshine of the breast" which lights up the "inaccessible" thickets, and sparkles amidst the "melancholy boughs" of the forest of Arden. Jaques may be Shakspeare's first type "of the censurer of mankind;" but Jaques is precisely the reverse of the character which the poet would have chosen, had he intended the censure to have more than a dramatic force—to be universally true and not individually characteristic. Jaques is strikingly a character of inconsistency; one, as Ulrici expresses it, "of witty sentimentality and merry sadness." Nothing can be more beautiful than the delineation; but it appears to us to be anything but the result of the poet's self-consciousness. We are induced to believe that Shakspeare's unbounded charity made him feel that there was a chance of Jaques being held somewhat too much of an authority, and that he in consequence made the Duke reprove him when he says,—

* Life prefixed to Moxon's edition, p. xlv.

"Invest me in my motley; give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and
through

Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,
If they will patiently receive my medicine.

Duke S. Fie on thee! I can tell what thou
wouldst do.

Jaques. What, for a counter, would I do but
good?

Duke S. Most mischievous foul sin, in
chiding sin:

For thou thyself hast been a libertine,
As sensual as the brutish sting itself;
And all the embossed sores, and headed evils,
That thou with licence of free foot hast
caught,

Wouldst thou disgorge into the general
world."

The German critic Ulrici, speaking of the characters of Jaques and Touchstone, calls them "*the two fools*." We are not about to pursue his argument; but we accept his classification, which is, indeed, startling. What! Is *he* a fool that moralises the spectacle of

"a poor sequester'd stag,
That from the hunters' aim had ta'en a hurt,"
and gives us, thereupon, "a thousand similes,"
with which

"most invectively he pierceth through
The body of the country, city, court"?

Is *he* a fool that "can suck melancholy out
of a song as a weazel sucks eggs"? Is *he* a
fool that

"met a fool i' the forest;"
whose

"lungs began to crow like chancicleer,
That fools should be so deep-contempla-
tive"—

and who himself aspires to be a fool:—

"I am ambitious for a motley coat"?

Is *he* a fool that tells us,

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players"?

Is *he* a fool who has gained his "experience,"
and whom the "sundry contemplation" of
his travels wraps in a "most humorous
sadness"? Is *he* a fool who commends him

whom the critic calls his brother fool as "good at anything, and yet a fool"? Lastly, is *he* a fool who rejects honour and advancement, and deserts the exiled Duke when he is restored to his state, because

"out of these convertites

There is much matter to be heard and learn'd"?

Assuredly, upon the first blush of the question, we must say that the German critic is wrong.

And yet, what is a *fool*, according to the Shakspearean definition? The fool is one

"Who laid him down and bask'd him in the sun,
And rail'd on lady Fortune in good terms,
In good set terms,—and yet a motley fool."

The fool is one that doth "moral on the time;" one that hath been a courtier;

"and in his brain,—

Which is as dry as the remainder biscuit
After a voyage, — he hath strange places
cramm'd

With observation, the which he vents
In mangled forms."

The fool is one that

"must have liberty

Withal, as large a charter as the wind."

The fool is one who

"will through and through

Cleanse the foul body of the infected world."

The fool is one who aims at every man, but, hitting or missing, thus justifies his attack:—

"Let me see wherein

My tongue hath wrong'd him: if it do him
right,

Then he hath wrong'd himself; if he be free,
Why then, my taxing like a wild goose flies,
Unclaim'd of any man."

And thus Jaques describes *himself*.

Now let us see what is the character of the companion fool, Touchstone. He introduces himself to us with a bit of fool's logic—that is, a comment upon human actions, derived from premises that are either above, or below, —which you please,—the ordinary argumentation of the world. His story of "a certain knight that swore by his honour they were

good pancakes" is not pointless. Perhaps it is a fool's bolt, and soon shot; yet it hits. But the fool is not without his affections. The friendship which Celia had for Rosalind is reciprocated by the friendship which the fool has for Celia:—

"*Ros.* But, cousin, what if we essay'd to steal

The clownish fool out of your father's court?
Would he not be a comfort to our travel?

Cel. He'll go along o'er the wide world
with me."

He is fled to the forest with the two ladies, their comfort, their protector:—

"My lord, the roynish clown, at whom so oft
Your grace was wont to laugh, is also missing."

They are in Arden; and then the fool becomes a philosopher:—

"Ay, now am I in Arden: the more fool I; when I was at home I was in a better place; but travellers must be content."

And then he goes on to laugh at romance in a land of romance, and tells us of "Jane Smile."

But next we hear of him growing "deep-contemplative" over his dial:—

"'Thus we may see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags:

'T is but an hour ago since it was nine;
And after one hour more 't will be eleven;
And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe,
And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot,
And thereby hangs a tale.'"

The fool's manners are changing. He did not talk thus in the court. He is quickly growing a philosopher. Hazlitt truly tells us that the following dialogue is better than all 'Zimmermann on Solitude,' where only half the question is disposed of:—

"*Cor.* And how like you this shepherd's life, master Touchstone?

Touch. Truly, shepherd, in respect of itself it is a good life; but in respect that it is a shepherd's life it is naught. In respect that it is solitary I like it very well; but in respect that it is private it is a very vile life. Now, in respect it is in the fields it pleaseth me well; but in respect it is not in the court it is tedious. As it is a spare life, look you, it fits my humour well; but as there is no more plenty in it, it goes

much against my stomach. Hast any philosophy in thee, shepherd?"

The fool has lived apart from human sympathies. He has been a thing to make idle people laugh; to live in himself alone; to be in the world and not of the world; to be licensed and despised; to have no responsibilities. The fool goes out of the social state in which he has moved, and he becomes a human being. His affections are called forth in a natural condition of society; he is restored to his fellow-creatures, *a man*, and *not a fool*. We do not think that Shakspeare meant the courtship of Touchstone and Audrey to be a *travestic* of the romantic passion of Orlando and Rosalind. It appears to us that it is anything but farce or irony when the fool and the shepherdess thus commune:—

"*Touch.* Truly, I would the gods had made thee poetical.

Aud. I do not know what poetical is: Is it honest in deed, and word? Is it a true thing?"

And there is anything but folly when Touchstone resolves

"Be it as it may be, I will marry thee."

A touch of the court—of his old vocation of saying without accountableness—lingers with him, when, rejoicing in that most original hedge priest, who says, "Ne'er a fantastical knave of them all shall flout me out of my calling"—(the Fleet prison priest of a century ago)—he hugs himself with the belief that "I were better to be married of him than of another;"—but he is after all the true lover, when he rejects the "most vile Mar-text," and in the honesty of his heart exclaims, "To-morrow is the joyful day, Audrey; to-morrow will we be married."

And thus, it appears to us, is Ulrici justified in denominating Jaques and Touchstone "*the two fools*." It was the characteristic of the Shakspearean fool to hang loose upon the society in which he was cherished; to affect no concern in its anxieties, no sympathy in its pleasures; to be passionless and sarcastic. Jaques, a banished courtier, refuses to seek companionship in the solitary life; he rejects its freedom:—he finds in it only a distorted mirror of the social life. The wounded stag

is "a broken bankrupt,"—the "careless herd" are "fat and greasy citizens." This is not real philosophy; it is false sentimentality. Jaques—refusing to adopt the tone of his companions, who have embraced the free life of the woods, its freshness, its privacy—has put himself into the condition of the fool, who belongs to the world only because he is a mocker of the world. When his friends sing,

"Who doth ambition shun,
And loves to live i' the sun,
Seeking the food he eats,
And pleased with what he gets,"

Jaques answers,

"If it do come to pass
That any man turn ass,
Leaving his wealth and ease,
A stubborn will to please," &c.

This is the answer of one for whom "motley's the only wear."

And yet how beautifully all this harmonises with the pastoral character of this delightful comedy! The professional fool gradually slides into a *real man*, from the power of sympathy, which is strong in him, and which is called forth by the absence of a just occasion for his professional unrealities. He is no longer a *chorus*. The clever but self-sufficient courtier, half in jest, half in earnest, becomes a mocker and a pretended misanthrope. He is passed into the *chorus* of the real action. In the mean while the main business of the comedy goes forward; and we live amongst all the natural and kindly impulses of true thoughts and feelings, mingled with weaknesses that are a part of this sincerity. But most certainly the spirit which breathes throughout is not one of censure, or sarcasm, or irony. It is a most loving, and sincere, and tolerant spirit—radiant with poetry, and therefore with truth. We desire nothing better to show that Shakspeare did not speak through Jaques than these words:—

"*Jaques.* Will you sit down with me? and we two will rail against our mistress the world, and all our misery.

Orlando. I will chide no breather in the world but myself; against whom I know most faults."

CHAPTER II.

TWELFTH NIGHT.

THIS comedy was first printed in the folio edition of 1623, under the title of 'Twelfth Night, or What you will.' The text is divided into acts and scenes; and the order of these has been undisturbed in the modern editions.

It is scarcely necessary to enter into any detail of the conjectures of the commentators as to the chronology of 'Twelfth Night.' Their guesses have been *proved* to be very wide of the mark. There was found in the British Museum, in 1828, a little manuscript diary of a student of the Middle Temple, extending from 1601 to 1603*, in which the following decisive passage occurs:—

"Feb. 2, 1601 [2].

"At our feast we had a play called 'Twelve night or what you will,' much like the comedy of errors, or Menechmis in Plautus, but most like & neere to that in Italian called Inganni. A good practise in it to make the steward believe his lady widdowe was in love with him, by counterfayting a letter, as from his lady, in generall termes telling him what shee liked best in him, & prescribing his gestures, inscribing his apparaile, &c., and then when he came to practise, making him beleieve they tooke him to be mad."

Here is an end then of conjecture. The play was no doubt publicly acted before this performance at the Candlemas feast of the Middle Temple; and it belongs, therefore, to the first year of the seventeenth century,

* We derive our particulars from Mr. Collier's valuable 'Annals of the Stage.' He says—"I was fortunate enough to meet with it among the Harleian Manuscripts in the Museum." Mr. Hunter, in his 'Disquisition on the Tempest,' says, "You may remember when, in 1828, I called your attention, at the British Museum, to the discovery which I had then made in the Diary of *Manningham*, that 'Twelfth Night' was performed in 1602, before the benchers of the Middle Temple." Mr. Hunter subsequently came to a belief that the 'Diary' was that of John Manningham, who was entered at the Middle Temple in 1597.

or the last of the sixteenth; for it is not found in the list of Meres, in 1598.

The romance literature of Europe was a common property, from which the Elizabethan writers of every grade drew materials for their own performances, using them up with all possible variety of adaptation. Italy was the great fountain-head of these fictions; although they might have travelled thither from the East, and gradually assumed European shape and character. In the hands of real poets, such as Boccaccio and Shakspeare, the original material was little more than the canvass upon which the artist worked. The commentators upon our poet tell us, with regard to 'Twelfth Night,' "There is great reason to believe that the serious part of this comedy is founded on some old translation of the seventh history in the fourth volume of Belleforest's 'Histoires Tragiques.' Belleforest took the story, as usual, from Bandello. *The comic scenes appear to have been entirely the production of Shakspeare.*" He *did* create, then, Sir Andrew, and Sir Toby, and Malvolio, and the Clown. But who created Viola, and Olivia, and the Duke? They were made, say the critics, according to the recipe of Bandello:—*Item*, a twin brother and sister; *item*, the sister in love, and becoming a page in the service of him she loved; *item*, the said page sent as a messenger to the lady whom her master loved; *item*, the lady falling in love with the page; *item*, the lady meeting with the twin-brother; *item*, all parties happily matched. All this will be found at great length in Mrs. Lenox's 'Shakspeare Illustrated,' accompanied with many profound remarks upon the poet's stupidity in leaving the safe track of the novelist; which remarks, being somewhat antiquated, may be passed over. Nor is it necessary for us to republish the entire story of 'Apolonius and Silla,' as told in a collection published

by Barnaby Rich, "containing very pleasant discourses fit for a peaceable time, gathered together for the only delight of the courteous gentlewomen of England and Ireland." The *argument* of Rich's story does not infer any great resemblance in the plots of the novel and the drama:—"Apolonius, Duke, having spent a year's service in the wars against the Turk, returning homewards with his company by sea, was driven by force of weather to the isle of Cypres, where he was well received by Pontus, governor of the same isle, with whom Silla, daughter to Pontus, fell so strangely in love, that, after Apolonius was departed to Constantinople, Silla, with one man, followed, and coming to Constantinople she served Apolonius in the habit of a man, and, after many pretty accidents falling out, she was known to Apolonius, who in requital of her love married her." But in the "*many pretty accidents*" we find a clear resemblance between the poet and the novelist; with the exception that the poet has thrown his own exquisite purity of imagination over the conduct of the two heroines, and that the novelist is not at all solicitous about this matter.

The following somewhat long extract, which includes the main points of resemblance, will furnish a very adequate notion of the difference between a dull and tedious narration and a drama running over with imagination, and humour, and wit;—in which the highest poetry is welded with the most intense fun: and we are made to feel that the loftiest and the most ludicrous aspect of human affairs can only be adequately presented by one who sees the whole from an eagle-height to which ordinary men cannot soar. But we do not complain that Barnaby Rich was not a Shakspeare:—

"And now, to prevent a number of injuries that might be proffered to a woman that was left in her case, she determined to leave her own apparel, and to sort herself into some of those suits, that, being taken for a man, she might pass through the country in the better safety; and as she changed her apparel she thought it likewise convenient to change her name; wherefore, not readily happening of any other, she called herself Silvio, by the name of

her own brother, whom you have heard spoken of before.

"In this manner she travelled to Constantinople, where she inquired out the palace of the Duke Apolonius, and, thinking herself now to be both fit and able to play the servingman, she presented herself to the Duke, craving his service. The Duke, very willing to give succour unto strangers, perceiving him to be a proper smooth young man, gave him entertainment. Silla thought herself now more than satisfied for all the casualties that had happened unto her in her journey, that she might at her pleasure take but the view of the Duke Apolonius, and above the rest of his servants was very diligent and attendant upon him, the which the Duke perceiving, began likewise to grow into good liking with the diligence of his man, and therefore made him one of his chamber: who but Silvio, then, was most near about him, in helping of him to make him ready in a morning in the setting of his ruffs, in the keeping of his chamber? Silvio pleased his master so well, that above all the rest of his servants about him he had the greatest credit, and the Duke put him most in trust.

"At this very instant there was remaining in the city a noble dame, a widow, whose husband was but lately deceased, one of the noblest men that were in the parts of Grecia, who left his lady and wife large possessions and great livings. This lady's name was called Julina, who, besides the abundance of her wealth and the greatness of her revenues, had likewise the sovereignty of all the dames of Constantinople for her beauty. To this lady Julina, Apolonius became an earnest suitor, and, according to the manner of lovers, besides fair words, sorrowful sighs, and piteous countenances, there must be sending of loving letters, chains, bracelets, brooches, rings, tablets, gems, jewels, and presents I know not what: * * * * Thus Apolonius was so busied in his new study, that I warrant you there was no man that could challenge him for playing the truant, he followed his profession with so good a will: and who must be the messenger to carry the tokens and love-letters to the lady Julina but Silvio his man? in him the Duke reposed his only confidence, to go between him and his lady.

"Now, gentlewomen, do you think there could have been a greater torment devised, wherewith to afflict the heart of Silla, than herself to be made the instrument to work her own

mishap, and to play the attorney in a cause that made so much against herself? But Silla, altogether desirous to please her master, cared nothing at all to offend herself, followed his business with so good a will as if it had been in her own preferment.

"Julina, now having many times taken the gaze of this young youth Silvio, perceiving him to be of such excellent perfect grace, was so entangled with the often sight of this sweet temptation, that she fell into as great a liking with the man as the master was with herself: and on a time, Silvio being sent from his master with a message to the lady Julina, as he began very earnestly to solicit in his master's behalf, Julina interrupting him in his tale, said, 'Silvio, it is enough that you have said for your master; from henceforth either speak for yourself, or say nothing at all.' * * * *

"And now for a time leaving matters depending as you have heard, it fell out that the right Silvio indeed (whom you have heard spoken of before, the brother of Silla) was come to his father's court, into the isle of Cypres, where, understanding that his sister was departed in manner as you have heard, conjectured that the very occasion did proceed of some liking had between Pedro, her man (that was missing with her), and herself; but Silvio, who loved his sister as dearly as his own life, and the rather for that she was his natural sister both by father and mother; so the one of them was so like the other in countenance and favour that there was no man able to discern the one from the other by their faces, saving by their apparel, the one being a man, the other a woman.

"Silvio therefore vowed to his father not only to seek out his sister Silla, but also to revenge the villany which he conceived in Pedro for the carrying away of his sister; and thus departing, having travelled through many cities and towns without hearing any manner of news of those he went to seek for, at the last he arrived at Constantinople, where, as he was walking in an evening for his own recreation on a pleasant green parade without the walls of the city, he fortun'd to meet with the lady Julina, who likewise had been abroad to take the air; and as she suddenly cast her eyes upon Silvio, thinking him to be her old acquaintance, by reason they were so like one another, as you have heard before, said unto him, 'I pray you let me have a little talk with you, seeing I have so luckily met you in this place.'

"Silvio, wondering to hear himself so rightly named, being but a stranger not of above two days' continuance in the city, very courteously came towards her, desirous to hear what she would say."

The rest may be imagined.

Mr. Collier informs us, in his 'Farther Particulars,' that, after vainly searching for eight years, he in 1839 met with the Italian play of the '*Inganni*,' mentioned in the barrister's Diary. This play, as Mr. Collier thinks, was known to Shakspeare; and certainly there is *some* resemblance between its plot and that of 'Twelfth Night.' The differences, however, are so considerable, that the parallel would scarcely be worth following out. We have to add that Mr. Hunter mentions that he has traced, in an Italian play called the '*Ingannati*' (not the '*Inganni*' of Manningham), the foundation of the serious part of 'Twelfth Night.'

There is something to our minds very precious in that memorial of Shakspeare which is preserved in the little Table-book of the Student of the Middle Temple: "Feb. 2, 1601 [2]. At our feast we had a play called '*Twelve night or what you will*.'" What a scene do these few plain words call up before us! The Christmas festivities have lingered on till Candlemas. The Lord of Misrule has resigned his sceptre; the Fox and the Cat have been hunted round the hall; the Masters of the Revels have sung their songs; the drums are silent which lent their noisy chorus to the Marshal's proclamations; and Sir Francis Flatterer and Sir Randle Rackabite have passed into the ranks of ordinary men*. But there is still a feast; and after the dinner a play; and that play Shakspeare's '*Twelfth Night*.' And the actual roof under which the happy company of benchers, and barristers, and students first listened to that joyous and exhilarating play, full of the truest and most beautiful humanities, especially fitted for a season of cordial mirthfulness, is still standing; and we may walk into that stately hall and think,—Here Shakspeare's '*Twelfth Night*' was acted in the Christmas of 1601; and

* Consult Dugdale's '*Origines Juridiciales*.'

here its exquisite poetry first fell upon the ear of some secluded scholar, and was to him as a fragrant flower blooming amidst the arid sands of his Bracton and his Fleta; and here its gentle satire upon the vain and the foolish penetrated into the natural heart of some grave and formal dispenser of justice, and made him look with tolerance, if not with sympathy, upon the mistakes of less grave and formal fellow-men; and here its ever-gushing spirit of enjoyment,—of fun without malice, of wit without grossness, of humour without extravagance,—taught the swaggering, roaring, overgrown boy, mis-called student, that there were higher sources of mirth than affrays in Fleet Street, or drunkenness in Whitefriars. Venerable Hall of the Middle Temple, thou art to our eyes more stately and more to be admired since we looked upon that entry in the Table-book of John Manningham! The Globe has perished, and so has the Blackfriars. The works of the poet who made the names of these frail buildings immortal need no associations to recommend them; but it is yet pleasant to know that there is one locality remaining where a play of Shakspeare was listened to by his contemporaries; and that play, 'Twelfth Night.'

Accepting, though somewhat doubtingly, the statement of the commentators that 'Twelfth Night' was produced as late as 1614, Schlegel says, "If this was really the *last work* of Shakspeare, as is affirmed, he must have enjoyed to the last the same *youthfulness of mind*, and have carried with him to the grave the whole fulness of his talents."* There is something very agreeable in this theory; but we can hardly lament that the foundation upon which it rests has been utterly destroyed. Shakspeare did, indeed, carry "with him to the grave the whole fulness of his talents," but they were talents, perhaps not of a higher order, but certainly employed upon loftier subjects, than those which were called out by the delicious comedies of the Shakspeare of forty. His "youthfulness of mind" too, even at this middle period of his life, is something

* 'Lectures on Dramatic Literature,' Black's translation, vol. ii. p. 175.

very different from the honeyed luxuriance of his spring-time—more subjected to his intellectual penetration into the hidden springs of human action—more regulated by the artistical skill of blending the poetical with the comic, so that in fact they are not presented as opposite principles constrained to appear in a patchwork union, but are essentially one and the same creation of the highest imaginative power. We are told that of 'Twelfth Night' the scenes in which Malvolio, and Sir Toby, and Sir Andrew appear are Shakspeare's *own*. The Duke, and Olivia, and Viola, and Sebastian, belong to some one else, it is said, because they existed, before he evoked them from their hiding-places, in the rude outlines of story-books without poetry, and comedies without wit. Honoured be the memories of Bandello and Barnaby Rich, not so much for their own work as for the happy accident by which they saved some popular tradition from oblivion, for a Shakspeare to make *his own* for all ages! Honoured be the learned or unlearned authors of the '*Inganni*' and the '*Ingannati*,' if they suggested to him that their shadowy representations of a wandering brother and sister, coming through mistakes and crosses to love and happiness, had in them dramatic capabilities such as *he* could deal with! Honoured be they, as we would honour the man, were his name recorded, who set the palette of Raphael or made Paganini's violin! Whether a writer *invents*, in the commonly received meaning of invention,—that is, whether his incidents and characters be spick-and-span new;—or whether he *borrow*s, using the same ordinary phraseology, his incidents and characters from tradition, or history, or written legends,—he is not a poet unless his materials are worked up into a perfect and consistent whole: and if the poetry be not in him, it matters little whether he raises his fabric "all out of his own head," as children say, or adopts a bit here and a bit there, and pieces them together with a bit of his own,—for his house will not stand; it is built upon the sands. Now it is this penetration of his own imaginative power in and through all his materials which renders it of little

more account than as a matter of antiquarian curiosity where Shakspeare picked up hints for the plots of his plays. He might have found the germ of Viola in Barnaby Rich; and he might have altogether invented Malvolio: but Viola and Malvolio are for ever indissolubly united, in the exact proportions in which the poetic and the comic work together for the production of a harmonious effect. The *neutral* title of 'Twelfth Night'—conveying as it does a notion of genial mirth—might warrant us in thinking that there was a preponderance of the comic spirit. Charles I. appears to have thought so, when, in his copy of the second edition of Shakspeare, he altered the title with his own pen to that of '*Malvolio*.'* But Malvolio is not the predominant idea of the comedy; nor is he of that exclusive interest that the whole action, even of the merely comic portions, should turn upon him. When Shakspeare means one character to be the centre of the dramatic idea, he for the most part tells us so in his title:—Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, Timon. Not one of the comedies has such a personal title, for the evident reason that the effect in them must mainly depend upon the harmony of all the parts, rather than upon the absorbing passion of the principal character. The 'Twelfth Night' is especially of this description. It presents us with the golden and the silver sides of human life,—the romantic and the humorous. But the two precious metals are moulded into one statue.

It is scarcely necessary for us to enter into any analysis of the plot of this charming comedy, or attempt any dissection of its characters, for the purpose of opening to the reader new sources of enjoyment. It is impossible, we think, for one of ordinary sensibility to read through the first act without yielding himself up to the genial temper in which the entire play is written. "The sunshine of the breast" spreads its rich purple light over the whole champaign, and penetrates into every thicket and every dingle.

* This copy, which formerly belonged to Steevens, was purchased for the private library of George III., and was retained when George IV. gave that valuable collection to the nation. It is now in the Queen's Library at Windsor.

From the first line to the last—from the Duke's

"That strain again;—it had a dying fall,"
to the Clown's

"With hey, ho, the wind and the rain,"—there is not a thought, nor a situation, that is not calculated to call forth pleasurable feelings. The love-melancholy of the Duke is a luxurious abandonment to one pervading impression—not a fierce and hopeless contest with one o'ermastering passion. It delights to lie "canopied with bowers,"—to listen to "old and antique" songs, which dally with its "innocence,"—to be "full of shapes," and "high fantastical." The love of Viola is the sweetest and tenderest emotion that ever informed the heart of the purest and most graceful of beings with a spirit almost divine. Perhaps in the whole range of Shakspeare's poetry there is nothing which comes more unbidden into the mind, and always in connection with some image of the ethereal beauty of the utterer, than Viola's "She never told her love." The love of Olivia, wilful as it is, is not in the slightest degree repulsive. With the old stories before him, nothing but the refined delicacy of Shakspeare's conception of the female character could have redeemed Olivia from approaching to the anti-feminine. But as it is we pity her, and we rejoice with her. These are what may be called the serious characters, because they are the vehicles for what we emphatically call the poetry of the play. But the comic characters are to us equally poetical—that is, they appear to us not mere copies of the representatives of temporary or individual follies, but embodyings of the universal comic, as true and as fresh to-day as they were two centuries and a half ago. Malvolio is to our minds as poetical as Don Quixote; and we are by no means sure that Shakspeare meant the poor cross-gartered steward *only* to be laughed at, any more than Cervantes did the knight of the rueful countenance. He meant us to pity him, as Olivia and the Duke pitied him; for, in truth, the delusion by which Malvolio was wrecked, only passed out of the romantic into the comic through the manifestation of the

vanity of the character in reference to his situation. But if we laugh at Malvolio we are not to laugh ill-naturedly, for the poet has conducted all the mischief against him in a spirit in which there is no real malice at the bottom of the fun. Sir Toby is a most genuine character,—one given to strong potations and boisterous merriment; but with a humour about him perfectly irresistible. His *abandon* to the instant opportunity of laughing at and with others is something so thoroughly English, that we are not surprised the poet gave him an English name. And like all genuine humorists Sir Toby must have his butt. What a trio is presented in that glorious scene of the second act, where the two Knights and the Clown

“make the welkin dance;”—the humorist, the fool, and the philosopher!—for Sir Andrew is the fool, and the Clown is the philosopher. We hold the Clown’s epilogue song to be the most philosophical Clown’s song upon record; and a treatise might be written upon its wisdom. It is the history of a life, from the condition of “a little tiny boy,” through “man’s estate,” to decaying age—“when I came unto my bed;” and the conclusion is, that what is true of the individual is true of the species, and what was of yesterday was of generations long past away—for

“A great while ago the world begun.”

Steevens says this “nonsensical ditty” is utterly unconnected with the subject of the comedy. We think he is mistaken.

CHAPTER III.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

THIS comedy was first printed in the folio collection of 1623, and there had been no previous claim to the right of printing it made by any entry in the registers of the Stationers’ Company. We are very much inclined to think, from the state of the original text, that the editors of the first folio possessed no copy but that from which they printed. Some of the sentences throughout the play are so involved that they have very little the appearance of being taken from a copy which had been used by the actors; and in two cases a word is found in the text (*prenzie*) which could never have been given upon the stage, and appears to have been inserted by the printer in despair of deciphering the author’s manuscript. On the other hand, the metrical arrangement, which has been called “rough, redundant, and irregular,” was strictly copied, we have no doubt, from the author’s original; for a printer does not mistake the beginnings and ends of blank-verse lines, although little attention might be paid to such matters in a prompter’s book. The peculiar structure

of the versification in this comedy was, we are satisfied, the result of the author’s system; and, from the integrity with which it has been preserved in the first edition, we believe that the original manuscript passed directly through the hands of the printer, who made the best of it without any reference to other copies.

We cannot trace that any allusion to ‘Measure for Measure’ is to be found in the works of Shakspeare’s contemporaries. There is, indeed, a passage in a poem published in 1607 which conveys the same idea as a passage in ‘Measure for Measure:’—

“And like as when some sudden extasy
Seizeth the nature of a sickly man;
When he’s discern’d to swoon, straight by
and by
Folk to his *help* confusedly have ran,
And seeking with their art to fetch him back,
So many *throng*, that he the *air* doth lack.”
(‘Myrrha, the Mother of Adonis,’ by
William Barksted.)

The following is the parallel passage in the comedy:—

"So play the foolish *throngs* with one that *swoons*;
Come all to *help* him, and so stop the *air*
By which he should revive."

Malone says of this coincidence, "That 'Measure for Measure' was written before 1607 may be fairly concluded from the following passage in a poem published in that year, which we have good ground to believe was copied from a similar thought in this play, as the author, at the end of his piece, professes a personal regard for Shakspeare, and highly praises his 'Venus and Adonis.'"^{*} The other arguments of Malone as to the date of this play, which he assigns to 1603, have reference to public circumstances. Chalmers contends for the date of 1604.

Conjectures such as these are too often laborious trifling. But, for once, they are pretty nearly borne out by incontrovertible testimony. The perseverance of Mr. Peter Cunningham has been rewarded by discovering in the Audit Office certain passages in the original Office Books of the Masters and Yeomen of the Revels, which fix the date of the representation at Court of some of Shakspeare's plays. The Office Book shows that 'Measure for Measure' was presented at Court by the King's Players in 1604.

The 'Promos and Cassandra' of George Whetstone, printed in 1578, but not acted, was, there can be no doubt, the foundation upon which Shakspeare built his 'Measure for Measure.' Whetstone tells us in a subsequent work that he constructed his play upon a novel of Giraldi Cinthio, of which he gives us a translation; observing, "This history, for rareness thereof, is livelily set out in a comedy by the reporter of the work, but yet never presented upon stage."[†]

The performance of Whetstone, as might be expected in a drama of that date, is feeble and monotonous, not informed with any real dramatic power, drawling or bombastic in its tragic parts, extravagant in its comic. It is scarcely necessary to offer to our readers any parallel examples of the modes in which Whetstone and Shakspeare have treated the same incidents.

"Look, the unfolding star calls up the shepherd." In the midst of the most business-like and familiar directions occur these eight words of the highest poetry. By a touch almost magical Shakspeare takes us in an instant out of that dark prison, where we have been surrounded with crime and suffering, to make us see the morning star bright over the hills, and hear the tinkle of the sheep-bell in the folds, and picture the shepherd bidding the flock go forth to pasture, before the sun has lighted up the dewy lawns. In the same way, throughout this very extraordinary drama, in which the whole world is represented as one great prison-house, full of passion, and ignorance, and sorrow, we have glimpses every now and then of something beyond, where there shall be no alternations of mildness and severity, but a condition of equal justice, serene as the valley under "the unfolding star," and about to rejoice in the dayspring.

The little passage which we have quoted is one amongst the numberless poetical gems which are scattered up and down this comedy with a profusion such as only belongs to one poet. It has been said of Shakspeare, "He is the text for the moralist and the philosopher. His bright wit is cut out 'into little stars'; his solid masses of knowledge are meted out in morsels and proverbs; and, thus distributed, there is scarcely a corner which he does not illuminate, or a cottage which he does not enrich."^{*} This is by no means his highest praise, and his 'Beauties' give a very imperfect idea of his attributes; but certainly no other man ever wrote single sentences that to such an extent have now become mixed up with the habits of thought of millions of human beings. This play appears to us especially glittering with these "little stars." We cannot open a scene in which we do not encounter some passage that has set us thinking at some moment of our lives. Of such distinct passages, which the memory never parts from, the following will be recognised by all as familiar friends:—

"Heaven doth with us as we with torches do;
Not light them for themselves: for if our
virtues

^{*} 'Chronological Order,' p. 387.

[†] 'Heptameron of Civil Discourses,' 1582.

^{*} 'Retrospective Review,' vol. vii. p. 381.

Did not go forth of us, 't were all alike
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely
touch'd
But to fine issues."

"Reason thus with life :
If I do lose thee, I do lose a thing
That none but fools would keep: a breath
thou art,
(Servile to all the skiey influences,)
That dost this habitation, where thou keep'st,
Hourly afflict."

"Merciful heaven !
Thou rather, with thy sharp and sulphurous
bolt,
Splitt'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
Than the soft myrtle : But man, proud man !
Dress'd in a little brief authority ;
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence,—like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,
As make the angels weep."

"The sense of death is most in apprehension ;
And the poor beetle, that we tread upon,
In corporal sufferance finds a pang as great
As when a giant dies."

We select these, contrary to our usual practice of not separating the parts from the whole, for the purpose of pointing out that there is something deeper in them than the power of expressing a moral observation strikingly and poetically. They are imbued with the writer's philosophy. They form a part of the system upon which the play is written. But, opposed to passages like these, there are many single sentences scattered through this drama which, so far from dwelling on with pleasure, we hurry past—which we like not to look upon again—which *appear* to be mere grossnesses. They are, nevertheless, an integral portion of the drama—they also form part of the system upon which the play is written. What is true of single passages is true of single scenes. Those between Isabella and Angelo, and Isabella and Claudio, are unsurpassed in the Shakspearean drama, for force, and beauty, and the delicate management of a difficult subject. But there are other scenes which appear simply revolting, such as those in which the Clown is conspicuous ; and even

Barnardine, one of the most extraordinary of Shakspeare's creations, will produce little beyond disgust in the casual reader. But these have, nevertheless, not crept into this drama by accident—certainly not from the desire "to make the unskilful laugh." Perhaps the effect of their introduction, coupled with the general subject of the dramatic action, is to render the entire comedy not pleasurable. Coleridge says, "This play, which is Shakspeare's throughout, is to me the most painful—say, rather, the only painful—part of his genuine works." This is a strong opinion ; and, upon the whole, a just one. But it requires explanation.

The general outline of the story upon which 'Measure for Measure' is founded is presented to us in such different forms, and with reference to such distinct times and persons, that, whether historically true or not, we can have no doubt of its universal interest. It is told of an officer of Charles the Bold, Duke of Burgundy ; of Oliver *le Diable*, the wicked favourite of Louis XI. ; of Colonel Kirke, in our own country ; of a captain of the Duke of Ferrara. In all these cases an unhappy woman sacrifices her own honour for the promised safety of one she loves ; and in all, with the exception of the case of Colonel Kirke, the abuser of authority is punished with death. Whatever interest may attach to the narrative of such an event, it is manifest that the dramatic conduct of such a story is full of difficulty, especially in a scrupulous age. But the public opinion, which, in this particular, would operate upon a dramatist in our own day, would not affect a writer for the stage in the times of Elizabeth and James ; and, in point of fact, plots far more offensive became the subject of very popular dramas long after the times of Shakspeare. It appears to us that, adopting such a subject in its general bearings, he has managed it with uncommon adroitness by his deviations from the accustomed story. By introducing a contrivance by which the heroine is not sacrificed, he preserves our respect for her, which would be involuntarily lost if she fell, even though against her own will ; and by this management he is also enabled to spare

the great offender without an unbearable violation of our sense of justice. But there was a higher aim in this even than the endeavour to produce a great dramatic effect.

It may be convenient if we first regard this comedy as a work of art, constructed with reference to the production of such dramatic effect. Without referring, then, to the peculiar character of the Duke, and his secret objects in delegating "mercy and mortality" to Angelo, we have to look only at the sudden and severe sentence which the fault of Claudio has called down upon him, and at the circumstances which arise out of the intervention of Isabella to procure a remission of his punishment. This is the simple view of the matter which we find in the novel of Cinthio, in Whetstone's play of 'Promos and Cassandra,' and in the pseudo-historical stories which deal with the same popular legend. It is in this point of view that we may consider the character of Isabella, acting upon one single and direct principle, without reference to the machinery of which she afterwards forms a part for carrying out the complicated management of the Duke. She is a being separated from all the evil influences—criminal, or ignorant, or weak—by which she is surrounded. In the eyes of the habitual profligate with whom she comes in contact she is

"—— a thing enskied and sainted."

In the eyes of the tempter her purity is her most fearful charm. To her a more strict restraint than is laid upon the votaries of St. Clare would be a benefit and not an evil. To the subjection of all rebellious thoughts in herself, to the cultivation of the spiritual parts of her nature, is she dedicated. She weeps for her brother; but she shrinks from the thought of going out of her own peculiar region to become his advocate:—

"Alas! what poor
Ability's in me to do him good?"

When she has taken her resolution, she is still doubtful of herself:—

"I'll see what I can do."

Few and timid are her words to Lucio;

shrinking and half ashamed is her first supplication to Angelo. She is as severe in her abstract view of guilt as the stern deputy himself:—

"There is a vice that most I do abhor,
And most desire should meet the blow of justice."

At the first repulse she is abashed and would retire. She is the cloistress, to whom it appears that to plead for guilt has the semblance of excusing it; but she gradually warms into sympathy and earnestness. She recollects that mercy, as well as justice, is amongst the divine attributes. She first ventures upon the enunciation of a general truth:—

"No ceremony that to great ones 'longs,
Not the king's crown, nor the deputed sword,
The marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe,
Become them with one half so good a grace
As mercy does."

But this general truth leads her to the declaration of the *higher* truth which she has most studied:—

"Alas! alas!

Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once;
And He that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy: How would you be,
If He, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are? O, think on that;
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new made."

From this moment she is self-possessed; and she stands before the organ of power pouring forth an impassioned eloquence with all the authority of a heavenly messenger. Then she is bold, even to the point of attacking the self-consciousness of the individual judge:—

"Go to your bosom;
Knock there; and ask your heart, what it doth
know
That's like my brother's fault: if it confess
A natural guiltiness, such as is his,
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
Against my brother's life."

And at last, when she believes he will relent, she offers him no thanks, she supplicates him with no tears; but she promises him the reward of

"True prayers,
That shall be up at heaven, and enter there,
Ere sunrise."

The foundation of Isabella's character is *religion*. In the second scene with Angelo the same spirit breathes in every line. Her humility—

"Let me be ignorant, and in nothing good,
But graciously to know I am no better;"—

her purity, which cannot understand the oblique purposes of the corrupt deputy;—her martyr-like determination when the hateful alternative is proposed to her—

"Were I under the terms of death,
The impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death, as to a bed
That longing had been sick for, ere I'd
yield;"—

her simplicity, that believes for a moment that virtue has only to denounce wickedness to procure its fall;—her confidence in her brother's "mind of honour;"—all these are the results of the same mental discipline. Most fearfully is her endurance tried, when she has to tell Claudio upon what terms his life may be spared. The unhappy man has calmly listened to the philosophical homily of the Duke, in which he finds what is really somewhat difficult to find in such general exhortations to patience and fortitude—

"To sue to live, I find I seek to die;
And seeking death find life."

He is to be sorely tempted; and his sister knows that he wants the one sustaining power which can resist temptation:—

"O, I do fear thee, Claudio; and I quake,
Lest thou a feverous life shouldst entertain,
And six or seven winters more respect
Than a perpetual honour."

Is her burst of passion, when her fears become true, and he utters the sophistry—

"What sin you do to save a brother's life,
Nature dispenses with the deed so far,
That it becomes a virtue,"—

is that terrible indignation, "take my defiance," unnatural or unjust in a mind so

constituted and so educated? The alternative was not for innocence to welcome death, but for purity to be reconciled to pollution. A lady, whose work Dr. Johnson has recommended as elegantly illustrating Shakspeare's departures from the novel of Cinthio, has been pleased to call Isabella "a vixen" and "a prude." It is satisfactory that, if the last age had its Lenox, who understood as little of her own sex as she did of Shakspeare, the present has its Jameson. It was truly said by the editors of the first folio, addressing their readers, "if then you do not like, surely you are in some manifest danger not to understand him." Mrs. Lenox set out upon the principle of depreciating Shakspeare, and she therefore utters absurdities such as these. Mrs. Jameson begins by reverencing him, and she therefore habitually gives us criticism as true and as beautiful as that which we now extract:—

"Nor should we fail to remark the deeper interest which is thrown round Isabella, by one part of her character, which is betrayed, rather than exhibited, in the progress of the action; and for which we are not at first prepared, though it is so perfectly natural. It is the strong under-current of passion and enthusiasm flowing beneath this calm and saintly self-possession; it is the capacity for high feeling, and generous and strong indignation, veiled beneath the sweet austere composure of the religious recluse, which, by the very force of contrast, powerfully impress the imagination. As we see in real life that where, from some external or habitual cause, a strong control is exercised over naturally quick feelings and an impetuous temper, they display themselves with a proportionate vehemence when that restraint is removed; so the very violence with which her passions burst forth, when opposed or under the influence of strong excitement, is admirably characteristic."

The leading idea, then, of the character of Isabella, is that of one who abides the direst temptation which can be presented to a youthful, innocent, unsuspecting, and affectionate woman—the temptation of saving the life of one most dear, by submitting to a

shame which the sophistry of self-love might represent as scarcely criminal. It is manifest that all other writers who have treated the subject have conceived that the temptation could not be resisted. Shakspeare alone has confidence enough in female virtue to make Isabella never for a moment even doubt of her proper course. But he has based this virtue, most unquestionably, upon the very highest principle upon which any virtue can be built. The character of Angelo is the antagonist to that of Isabella. In a city of licentiousness he is

"A man of stricture and firm abstinence."

He is

"Precise ;

Stands at a guard with envy ; scarce confesses
That his blood flows."

He is one who

"Doth rebate and blunt his natural edge
With profits of the mind, study and fast."

But he wanted the one sustaining principle by which Isabella was upheld. Ulrici has sketched his character vigorously and truly :—"Angelo, who makes profession of a rigorous moral purity, boasts continually of his virtue, urges chastisement and severity, and inexorably persecutes sin and weakness, —who, in fact, has also the will to be what he seems,—even he falls from his arrogant height, in a far worse manner, into the same crime that, contrary to his pledged word, he would punish with the full severity of the law. Once subdued by human weakness, he becomes the basest hypocrite and deceiver. The vain self-trusting virtue shows itself in him in its thorough weakness and inanity."

After Shakspeare had conceived the character of Isabella, and in that conception had made it certain that her virtue must pass unscathed through the fire, he had to contrive a series of incidents by which the catastrophe should proceed onward through all the stages of Angelo's guilt of intention, and terminate in his final exposure. Mr. Hallam says, "There is great skill in the invention of Mariana, and without this the story could not have anything like a satisfactory termination." But there is great skill also in the management of the incident

in the Duke's hands, as well as in the invention ; and this is produced by the wonderful propriety with which the character of the Duke is drawn. He is described by Hazlitt as a very imposing and mysterious stage character, absorbed in his own plots and gravity. This is said depreciatingly. But it is precisely this sort of character that Shakspeare meant to put in action. Chalmers has a random hit, which comes, we think, something near the truth. "The commentators seem not to have remarked that the character of the Duke is a very accurate delineation of that of King James." James was a pedant, and the Duke is a philosopher ; but there is the same desire in each to get behind the curtain and pull the strings which move the puppets. We are not sure that Angelo's flattery did not save him, as much as Isabella's intercession :—

"O my dread lord,

I should be guiltier than my guiltiness,

To think I can be undiscernible,

When I perceive your grace, like power di-
vine,

Hath look'd upon my passes."

As a ruler of men the Duke is weak, and he knows his own weakness :—

"*Fri.* It rested in your grace

To unloose this tied-up justice when you
pleased :

And it in you more dreadful would have
seem'd

Than in lord Angelo.

Duke. I do fear, too dreadful :

Sith 't was my fault to give the people scope,

'T would be my tyranny to strike and gall
them

For what I bid them do."

And yet he does really strike and gall them through another ; but he saves himself the labour and the slander.

And here, then, as it appears to us, we have a key to the purpose of the poet in the introduction of what constitutes the most unpleasant portion of this play,—the exhibition of a very gross general profligacy. There is an atmosphere of impurity hanging like a dense fog over the city of the poet. The philosophical ruler, the saintly votaress, and the sanctimonious deputy, appear to be—

long to another region to that in which they move. The grossness is not merely described or inferred;—but we see those who minister to the corruptions, and we are brought in contact with the corrupted. This, possibly, was not necessary for the higher dramatic effects of the comedy; but it was necessary for those lessons of political philosophy which we think Shakspeare here meant to inculcate, and which he appears to us on many occasions to have kept in view in his later plays. Mr. Hallam has most truly said of ‘Measure for Measure’ that “the depths and intricacies of being, which he (Shakspeare) has searched and sounded with intense reflection, perplex and harass him.” In this play he manifests, as we apprehend, his philosophical view of a corrupt state of manners fostered by weak government: but the subject is scarcely dramatic, and it struggles with his own proper powers. Here we have an exhibition of crimes of passion, and crimes of ignorance. There stands the Duke, the representative of a benevolent and tolerant executive power which does not meddle with the people,—which subjects them to no harsh restrictions,—which surrounds them with no biting penalties; but which utterly fails in carrying out the essential principle of government when it disregards prevention, and sees no middle course between neglect and punishment. A new system is to be substituted; the *laissez faire* is to be succeeded by the “axe upon the block, very ready;” and then come all the commonplaces by which a reign of terror is to be defended:—

“We must not make a scarecrow of the law,
Setting it up to fear the birds of prey,
And let it keep one shape, till custom make it
Their perch, and not their terror.”

* * * * *

“The law hath not been dead, though it hath
slept:

Those many had not dared to do that evil,
If the first that did the edict infringe
Had answer’d for his deed; now, ’t is awake.”

The philosophical poet sweeps these saws away with an indignation which is the more emphatic as coming from the mouth of the only truly moral character of the whole drama:—

“Could great men thunder
As Jove himself does, Jove would ne’er be
quiet,
For every pelting, petty officer
Would use his heaven for thunder: nothing
but thunder.”

But he does more—he exhibits to us the every-day working of the hot fit succeeding the cold of legislative and executive power. It works always with injustice. The Duke of the comedy is behind the scenes, and sees how it works. The weak governor resumes his authority, and with it he must resume his principles, and he therefore pardons all. The mouth-repenting deputy, and the callous ruffian, they each escape. We forget; he does not pardon *all*; the prating coxcomb, who has spoken slander of his own person, is alone punished. Was this accident in the poet? Great crimes may be looked over by weak governments, but the pettiest libeller of power is inevitably punished. The catastrophe of this comedy necessarily leaves upon the mind an unsatisfactory impression. Had Angelo been adequately punished it would have been more unsatisfactory. When the Duke took the management of the affair into his own hands, and averted the consequences of Angelo’s evil intentions by a series of deceptions, he threw away the power of punishing those evil intentions. We agree with Coleridge that the pardon and marriage of Angelo “baffle the strong indignant claims of justice;” but we cannot see how it could be otherwise. The poet, as it appears to us, exhibits to the end the inadequacy of human laws to enforce public morals upon a system of punishment. But he has not forgotten to exhibit to us incidentally the most beautiful lessons of tolerance; not using ‘Measure for Measure’ in the sense of the *jus talionis*, but in a higher spirit—that spirit which moves Isabella to supplicate for mercy towards him who had most wronged her:—

“Most bounteous sir,
Look, if it please you, on this man condemn’d,
As if my brother lived: I partly think,
A due sincerity govern’d his deeds,
Till he did look on me; since it is so,
Let him not die.”

CHAPTER IV.

HAMLET.

THE comprehension of this tragedy is the history of a man's own mind. In some shape or other, "Hamlet the Dane" very early becomes familiar to almost every youth of tolerable education. He is sometimes presented through the medium of the stage; more frequently in some one of the manifold editions of the acted play. The sublime scenes where the ghost appears are known even to the youngest school-boy, in his 'Speakers' and 'Readers;' and so is the soliloquy, "To be, or not to be." As we in early life become acquainted with the *complete* acted play*, we hate the King,—we weep for Ophelia,—we think Hamlet is cruel to her,—we are perhaps inclined with Dr. Johnson to laugh at Hamlet's madness, ("the pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth,") we wonder that Hamlet does not kill the King earlier,—and we believe, as Garrick believed, that the catastrophe might have been greatly improved, seeing that the wicked and the virtuous ought not to fall together, as it were by accident.

A few years onward, and we have become acquainted with the 'Hamlet' of Shakspeare,—not the 'Hamlet' of the players. The book is now the companion of our lonely walks;—its recollections hang about our most cherished thoughts. We think less of the dramatic movement of the play than of the glimpses which it affords of the high and solemn things that belong to our being. We see Hamlet habitually subjected to the spiritual part of his nature,—communing with thoughts that are not of this world,—abstracted from the business of life,—but yet exhibiting a most vigorous intellect, and an exquisite taste. But there is that about him which we cannot understand. Is he essentially "in madness," or mad "only in craft?" Where is the line to be drawn between his artificial and his real character?

* A notice of the earliest edition of 'Hamlet' will be found in Book II., chapter III., page 57.

There is something altogether indefinable and mysterious in the poet's delineation of this character;—something wild and irregular in the circumstances with which the character is associated;—we see that Hamlet is propelled, rather than propelling. But why is this turn given to the delineation? We cannot exactly tell. Perhaps some of the very charm of the play to the adult mind is its mysteriousness. It awakes not only thoughts of the grand and the beautiful, but of the incomprehensible. Its obscurity constitutes a portion of its sublimity. This is the stage in which most minds are content to rest, and, perhaps, advantageously so, with regard to the comprehension of 'Hamlet.'

The final appreciation of the 'Hamlet' of Shakspeare belongs to the development of the critical faculty,—to the cultivation of it by reading and reflection. Without much acquaintance with the thoughts of others, many men, we have no doubt, being earnest and diligent students of Shakspeare, have arrived at a tolerably adequate comprehension of his *idea* in this wonderful play. In passing through the stage of admiration, they have utterly rejected the trash which the commentators have heaped upon it, under the name of criticism,—the solemn commonplaces of Johnson, the flippant and insolent attacks of Steevens. When the one says, "the apparition left the regions of the dead to little purpose,"—and the other talks of the "*absurdities*" which deform the piece, and "the *immoral* character of Hamlet,"—the love for Shakspeare tells them, that remarks such as these belong to the same class of prejudices as Voltaire's "*monstruosités et fossoyeurs*." But, after they have rejected all that belongs to criticism without love, the very depth of the reverence of another school of critics may tend to perplex them. This is somewhat our own position. The quantity alone that has been written in illustration of 'Hamlet' is embarrassing.

Goethe, Coleridge, Schlegel, Lamb, Hazlitt, and we may add Mrs. Jameson,—besides anonymous writers out of number, and some of the very highest order of excellence,—have brought to the illustration of this play a most valued fund of judgment, taste, and æsthetical knowledge. To condense what is most deserving of remembrance in these admirable productions, within due limits, would be impossible. We must endeavour, therefore, to feel ourselves in the condition of one who has, however imperfectly, worked out in his own mind a comprehension of the idea of Shakspeare; occasionally assisting our development of this inadequate comprehension by a few extracts from some of the eloquent pages to which we have adverted.

The opening of 'Hamlet' is one of the most absorbing scenes in the Shakspearean drama. It produces its effect by the supernatural being brought into the most immediate contact with the real. The sentinels are prepared for the appearance of the ghost,—Horatio is incredulous,—but they are all surrounded with an atmosphere of common life. "Long live the King,"—"Get thee to bed,"—"Tis bitter cold,"—"Not a mouse stirring,"—and the familiar pleasantries of Horatio, "a piece of him,"—exhibit to our minds under the ordinary state of human feeling. At the moment when the recollections of Bernardo arise into that imaginative power which belongs to the tale he is about to tell, the ghost appears. All that was doubtful in the narrative of the supernatural vision—what left upon Horatio's mind the impression only of a "thing,"—becomes as real as the silence, the cold, and the midnight. The vision is then, "most like the King,"

"Such was the very armour he had on."

The ghost remains but an instant; and we are again amongst the realities of common life,—the preparations for war—the history of the quarrel that caused the preparation. The vision, in the mind of Horatio, is connected with the fates of his "climatures and countrymen." When the ghost re-appears, there is still a tinge of scepticism in the soldiers:—

"Shall I strike at it with my partizan?"

But their incredulity is at once subdued; and a resolution is taken by Horatio upon the conviction that what he once held as a "fantasy," is a dreadful thing, of whose existence there can be no doubt:—

"Let us impart what we have seen to-night
Unto young Hamlet: for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him."

We have here, by anticipation, all the deep and inexplicable consequences of this vision laid upon young Hamlet; it is *his* destiny—it is to *him* the—

"Prologue to the omen coming on."

Goethe, in his 'Wilhelm Meister,' has made his hero describe the mode in which he endeavoured to understand 'Hamlet.' "I set about investigating every trace of Hamlet's character, as it had shown itself before his father's death. I endeavoured to distinguish what in it was independent of this mournful event; independent of the terrible events that followed; and what most probably the young man would have been, had no such thing occurred." In this spirit he tells us, that he was pleasing, polished, courteous, united the idea of moral rectitude with princely elevation, desirous of praise, pure in sentiment, tasteful, calm in his temper, artless in his conduct, possessing more mirth of humour than of heart. This is ingenious, but it appears to us to refine somewhat too much. In Shakspeare's dramas, the characters, as they are developed by the incidents, expound themselves, and in the order in which the exposition becomes necessary. Wilhelm Meister's preliminary analysis of Hamlet's character stands only in the place of the description by which dramatists inferior to Shakspeare present a character to an audience. Our poet first shows us what Hamlet is, before his mind is laid under the terrific weight and responsibility of a revelation. His moral sense is outraged by the indecent marriage of his mother. We have a slight intimation that his honourable ambition was disappointed in the election of his uncle to the sovereignty. The sudden death of his father had called forth all the sensi-

bilities that belonged to a deeply meditative nature :

"I have that within which passeth show."

It is in this period that his own wounded spirit compels him to look with a jaundiced eye upon "all the uses of this world," and to indulge a wish, restrained only by a sense of piety, that the "unweeded garden" might be left by him to be possessed by "things rank, and gross in nature." But he communes with himself in a tone which bespeaks the habitual refinement of his thoughts; and his words shape themselves into images which belong to the high and cultivated intellect. The mode in which he receives Horatio shows that his dejection is not habitual. It has been impressed on his nature by a sudden blow;—a father dead,—a mother disgracefully married,—a crown snatched from him. He welcomes his old friend with the warmth and frankness of the gentleman; but the abiding sorrow in a moment comes over him :—

"I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow-student."

The disclosure of Horatio's purpose in his visit is admirably managed in its abruptness. Nothing, it appears to us, within the power of language, can produce the effect of the questions which Hamlet puts to Horatio; and his answer to the somewhat commonplace remark, "It would have much amaz'd you;"—"very like, very like," is something beyond art; it looks like an instinctive perception of the most complex mental processes.

Coleridge calls the next scene, that between Laertes, Ophelia, and Polonius, "one of Shakspeare's lyric movements;" and he elegantly adds, "you experience the sensation of a pause without the sense of a stop." It was necessary to interpose a scene between Horatio's narrative and the appearance of the ghost to Hamlet; and the scene before us carries out the dramatic characters which are essential to the plot, without interrupting the main interest. But the hour of Hamlet's trial is come. The revelation is to be made. He is to endure an ordeal which is to shake his disposition,

"With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls."

The vision, which, even when his incredulity has passed away, seems to Horatio only a "thing majestic," is to Hamlet, "king, father, royal Dane." From the first word of Horatio's narrative to this moment of the real presence of the apparition, Hamlet has no doubts. The excited state of his mind had prepared him to welcome the belief that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy." Beautifully characteristic is his determination to follow the vision; and when the revelation comes, who could have managed it like Shakspeare! The images are of this world, and are not of this world. They belong at once to popular superstition, and to the highest poetry. Nothing can be more distinct than the narrative of the vision; nothing more mysterious than the "eternal blazon" that "must not be to ears of flesh and blood." How exquisite are the last lines of the ghost;—full of the poetry of external nature, and of the depth of human affections, as if the spirit that had for so short a time been cut off from life, to know the secrets of the "prison-house," still clung to the earthly remembrance of the beautiful and the tender that even a spirit might indulge :

"The glow-worm shows the matin to be near,
And 'gins to pale his ineffectual fire :
Adieu, adieu, Hamlet ! remember me."

The modes in which Hamlet thinks aloud, after the spirit has faded away, suggests this subtle illustration to Coleridge : "Shakspeare alone could have produced the vow of Hamlet to make his memory a blank of all maxims and generalized truths that 'observation had copied there,'—followed immediately by the speaker noting down the generalized fact

'That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.'"

Coleridge, of course, means to offer this as a trait of the disturbance of Hamlet's intellect—(not madness, even in the popular sense of the term,—certainly not madness,

physiologically speaking, but unfixedness, derangement, we would have said, had not that word become a sort of synonym for madness), which Shakspeare intended, as it appears to us, to exhibit as the result of his supernatural visitation. Goethe says, "To me it is clear that Shakspeare meant, in the present case, to represent the effects of a great action laid upon a soul unfit for the performance of it." Coleridge, in speaking of that part of the scene after the interview with the ghost, in which Hamlet assumes what has been called "an improbable eccentricity," attributes to Hamlet "the disposition to escape from his own feelings of the overwhelming and supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous, a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium." He adds, "*For you may perhaps observe that Hamlet's wildness is but half false.*" It is under the immediate influence of this "disorder in his soul,"—this "shaking and unsettling of its powers from their due sources of action,"* that Hamlet takes the instantaneous resolution of feigning himself mad. He feels that his mind is horridly disturbed with thoughts beyond mortal reach; but he believes that the habitual powers of his intellect can control this disturbance, and even render it an instrument of his own safety. The very able writer from whose anonymous paper we have just quoted says, "If there be anything disproportioned in his mind, it seems to be this only,—that intellect is in excess. It is even ungovernable, and too subtle. His own description of perfect man, ending with 'In apprehension how like a god!' appears to me consonant with that character, and spoken in the high and overwrought consciousness of intellect. Much that requires explanation in the play may perhaps be explained by this predominance and consciousness of great intellectual power. Is it not possible that the instantaneous idea of feigning himself mad belongs to this?"

It is here, then, that the complexity of Hamlet's character begins. It is in the description of Ophelia that he is first presented

to us, at some short period after the supernatural visitation:—

"He took me by the wrist, and held me hard;
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
And, with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face,
As he would draw it. Long stay'd he so;
At last,—a little shaking of mine arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and
down,—

He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound,
That it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being: That done, he lets me go:
And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
For out o' doors he went without their help,
And, to the last, bended their light on me."

This was not the "antic disposition" which Hamlet thought meet to put on. It was not the "ecstasy of love," produced by Ophelia's coldness, according to Polonius. But it was the utterance, as far as it could be uttered, of his sense of the hard necessity that was put upon him to go forth to a mortal struggle with evil powers and influences;—to cast away all the high and pleasant thoughts that belonged to the cultivation of his understanding;—to tear himself from all the soothing and delicious fancies that would arise out of the growth of his affection for that simple maid upon whom he bestowed "a sigh so piteous." Under the pressure of the one absorbing "commandment" that had been imposed upon him, he had vowed that it should live "within the volume of his brain, unmixed with baser matter." All else in the world had become to him mean and unimportant. Love was now to him a "trivial fond record,"—the wisdom of philosophy, "the saws of books." All "that youth and observation copied," was to be forgotten in that dread word, "remember me." But Hamlet had put the "antic disposition on." The King had seen his "transformation." The courtiers talked familiarly of his "lunacy." The disguise which he had adopted was not accidentally chosen. The subtlety of his intellect directed him to that tone of wayward sarcasm in which, while he appeared to others to be merely wandering, the bitter-

* 'Blackwood's Magazine, vol. ii. page 504.

ness of his soul might be relieved by the utterance of "wild and hurling words." But even in this disguise his intellectual supremacy is constantly manifested. "He is far gone, far gone," says Polonius; but, "how pregnant his replies are," very quickly follows. In the scene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern the natural Hamlet instantly comes back. They were his school-fellows; they ought to have been his friends. To them, therefore, he is the Hamlet they once knew; the gentleman—the scholar. He even discloses to them a glimpse of the deep melancholy with which his soul laboured: "O God! I could be bounded in a nut-shell, and count myself a king of infinite space; were it not that I have bad dreams." But he goes no further:—he sees through their purpose; "nay, then I have an eye of you." They were to be spies upon him; and from that moment he hates them. They stood, or they appeared to stand, between him and the great purpose of his life. But he suppresses his feelings, and bursts out in that majestic piece of rhetoric which could only have been conceived by a being of the highest intellectual power, in the full possession of that power: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god!" The writer in Blackwood truly says, that this is "spoken in the high and overwrought consciousness of intellect." Hamlet has described his melancholy to his old school-fellows,—the indifference with which he views "this visible world." Here again, unquestionably, he is not feigning. He knows that the admission of his melancholy will put the spies upon a false scent. Burton's 'Anatomy' was not published when Shakspeare wrote this play; and yet how consonant is the following passage of that book with Shakspeare's conception of the melancholy Hamlet: "Albertus Durer paints Melancholy like a sad woman, leaning on her arm with fixed looks, neglected habit, &c., held therefore by some proud, soft, sottiſh, or half-mad, as the Abderites esteemed of Democritus: and yet of a deep reach,

excellent apprehension, judicious, wise, and witty." In the scene with the players Hamlet is perfectly at ease, "judicious, wise, and witty." He has escaped for a moment, out of the dense clouds of the one o'er-mastering thought, into the sunny region of taste and fancy in which he once dwelt. But even here the one thought follows him:—"Dost thou hear me, old friend; can you play the murder of Gonzago?" Then comes, "Now I am alone;" and, as Charles Lamb has beautifully expressed it, "the silent meditations with which his bosom is bursting are reduced to words, for the sake of the reader." But, in the midst of his paroxysm, his intellectual activity predominates: "About, my brains;" and he escapes from the thought—

"I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave's offal,"

into—

"I'll have grounds
More relative than this: The play's the thing."

The indecision of Hamlet is thus described by Goethe: "A lovely, pure, noble, and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear, and must not cast away." The writer in 'Blackwood's Magazine' takes another view of this indecision, which, to our minds, is more philosophic: "He sees no course clear enough to satisfy his understanding." Hamlet, be it observed, is not without nerve. Let us recollect—"I will watch to-night,"—and,

"My fate cries out,
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve."

He is not without nerve. But his *will* is subject to higher faculties. He would have been greater had he been less great.

We are scarcely yet cognizant of the depths of Hamlet's meditations. Under the first pressure of his wounded sensibilities we have heard him exclaim—

"Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt;"
but he has since communed with unearthly things, and he now fearlessly approaches the great questions that have reference to the

"something after death," as if the mystery could be pierced by the eye of reason. Of the soliloquy, "To be, or not to be," Coleridge remarks, "This speech is of absolutely universal interest,—and yet to which of all Shakspeare's characters could it have been appropriately given but to Hamlet?" But we must mark the period of its introduction. It immediately precedes the scene of Hamlet's abrupt behaviour to Ophelia. It does so in the original sketch. She comes upon him with

"My lord, I have remembrances of yours,"

at a moment when his mind had surrendered itself to a train of the most solemn thought, induced by following out all the mysterious and fearful circumstances connected with his own being, and the awful responsibilities that were imposed upon him. It appears to us, that his rude denial of having given Ophelia "remembrances," and his "Ha, ha! are you honest?" with all the bitter words that follow, are meant to indicate the disturbance which is produced in his mind by the clashing of his love for her with the predominant thought that now makes all that belongs to his personal happiness worthless. His invective against women is not more bitter than his invective against himself:—"What should such fellows as I do crawling between heaven and earth!" His bitterness escapes in generalizations: it is not against Ophelia, but against her sex, that he exclaims. To that gentle creature, the harshest thing he says is, "Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny." Coleridge thinks that the "certain harshness" in Hamlet's manner is produced by his perceiving that Ophelia was acting a part towards him and that they were watched. We doubt whether Shakspeare intended Hamlet to be here feigning. The passionate words are merely the exponents of the contest within,—the contest between his love and the purpose which appeared to him to exclude all other thoughts. There was a real disturbance of his soul, which could only recover its balance by such an outbreak. The character of the disturbance is indicated by the contradiction of "I did love you once,"

and "I loved you not;" and, perhaps, as Lamb expresses it, these "tokens of an unhinged mind" are mixed "with a profound artifice of love, to alienate Ophelia by affected discourtesies, so to prepare her mind for the breaking off of that loving intercourse which can no longer find a place amidst business so serious as that which he has to do." At any rate, the gentle and tender Ophelia is not outraged. Her pity only is excited; and, if the apparent harshness of Hamlet requires a proper appreciation of his character to reconcile it with our admiration of him, Shakspeare has at this moment most adroitly presented to us that description of him which Goethe anticipated—

"The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword,

The expectancy and rose of the fair state."

Hamlet recovers a temporary tranquillity. He has something to do; and that something is connected with his great business. It is more agreeable that it postpones that one duty, while it seems to lead onward to it. He has to prepare the players to speak his speech. Those who look upon the surface only may think these directions uncharacteristic of Hamlet; but nothing can really be more appropriate than that these rules of art, so just, so universal, and so complete, should be put by Shakspeare into the mouth of him who had pre-eminently "the scholar's tongue." Hamlet revels in this lesson; and it has produced a calm in his spirits, which is displayed in that affectionate address to Horatio, in which he appears to repose upon his friend as one

"Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,"—

to be, as it were, a prop to his own "weakness and melancholy." Be it observed that this is the first indication we have had that he has admitted Horatio into his confidence:—

"There is a play to-night before the king:

One scene of it comes near the circumstance

Which I have told thee of my father's death."

The satisfaction he takes in the device of the "one scene"—the hopes which he has that his doubts may be resolved—lend a real

elevation to his spirits, which may pass for his feigned "madness." He utters whatever comes uppermost; and the freedoms which he takes with Ophelia, while they are equally remote from bitterness or harshness, are such as in Shakspeare's age would not offend pure ears. The mixture in his wild speeches of fun and pathos is nevertheless most touching. "What should a man do, but be merry?" comes from the profoundest depths of a wounded spirit. The test is applied; the King is "frighted with false fire,"—his "occulted" guilt has unkennelled itself. The elation of Hamlet's mind is at its height. His contempt of the King is openly pronounced to his creatures;—Rosencrantz and Guildenstern quail before his biting sarcasm;—Polonius is his butt. All this is, as he thinks, the coruscations of the cloud before the deadly flash. "Now could I drink hot blood," is the feeling that is at the bottom of all. Then comes the scene in which the King prays, and Hamlet postpones his revenge, with an excuse almost too dreadful to belong to human motives. They were not *his* motives. Coleridge discriminates between "impetuous, horror-striking fiendishness," and "the marks of reluctance and procrastination;" and it is sufficient to note this distinction, without entering into any refutation of opinions which show that it is easier to write mouthingly or pertly, as some have done, than to understand Shakspeare. It is in the scene with the Queen that Hamlet vindicates his own sanity—

"It is not madness
That I have uttered: bring me to the test,
And I the matter will re-word; which madness
Would gambol from."

This is 'Shakspeare's Test of Insanity;'—the title of an Essay by Sir H. Halford, in which he illustrates from his experience the accuracy of our great poet's delineations of the phenomena of mental disorder. Our readers will find a very able article on this Essay in 'The Quarterly Review,' vol. xlix. p. 181.

Hamlet abstained from killing the King when he was "praying." This was a part of his weakness. But he did not abandon his purpose. The forced devotion of the guilty man,—the "physic," as Hamlet calls

it, did but prolong his "sickly days." Polonius falls by an accident, instead of his "betters." The "wretched, rash, intruding fool" was sacrificed to a sudden impulse, which stood in the place of a determinate exercise of the will. Hamlet scarcely regrets the accident:—"take thy fortune." His mind is eased by his colloquy with his mother. The vision again appears to whet his "almost blunted purpose;" but nothing is done. His intellect is again at its subtleties:—

"There's letters seal'd: and my two school-fellows,—

Whom I will trust, as I will adders fang'd,—
They bear the mandate; they must sweep my way,

And marshal me to knavery: Let it work;
For 't is the sport, to have the engineer
Hoist with his own petar: and 't shall go hard,
But I will delve one yard below their mines,
And blow them at the moon."

He casts himself like a feather upon the great wave of fate;—he embraces the events that marshalled him "to knavery." Dangerous as they be, they are better than doubt. He believes that he pierces through the darkness of his fate:—"I see a cherub, that sees him." He leaves for England; not forgetting *him* whose

"Form and cause conjoin'd, preaching to
stones,

Would make them capable;"

but still meditating instead of acting. It would be a curious problem to be solved, but it will never be solved, whether Shakspeare himself obliterated the scene which only appears in the second quarto*, in which the workings of Hamlet's mind at this juncture are so distinctly revealed to us. That he meant the character to be mysterious, though not inexplicable, there can be no doubt. Does it become too plain when Hamlet's meeting with the Norwegian captain leads him into a train of thought, at first made up of generalizations, but in the end most conclusive as to the causes of his indecision?—

"Now, whether it be
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple

* Act iv., Scene iv.

Of thinking too precisely on the event,—
 (A thought, which, quarter'd, hath but one
 part wisdom,
 And ever, three parts coward),—I do not know
 Why yet I live to say, 'This thing's to do;'—
 Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and
 means,
 To do't."

It was not "bestial oblivion."—Oh, no. The eternal presence of the thought—"this thing's to do," made him incapable of doing it. It was the "thinking too precisely on the event" that destroyed his will. It was in the same spirit that his will had been "puzzled" by the "dread of something after death,"—that his conscience—(consciousness)—"sicklied o'er" his "native hue of resolution." The "delicate and tender prince" exposed what was mortal and unsure to fortune, death, and danger, even for an egg-shell. Twenty thousand men, for a fantasy and trick of fame, went to their graves like beds. But, then, the men and their leader made "mouths at the invisible event." The "large discourse" of Hamlet, "looking before, and after," absorbed the tangible and present. In actions that appear indirectly to advance the execution of the great "commandment" that was laid upon him, he has decision and alacrity enough. His relation to Horatio (we are somewhat anticipating) of his successful device against Rosencrantz and Guildenstern would appear to come from a man who is *all* will. His intellectual activity revels in the telling of the story. Coleridge has admirably pointed out, in 'The Friend,' how "the circumstances of time and place are all stated with equal compression and rapidity;" but still, with the relater's general tendency to generalize. The event has happened, and Hamlet does not think too precisely of its consequences. The issue will be shortly known.

"It will be short: the interim is mine;
 And a man's life's no more than to say—one."

This looks like decision, growing out of the narrative of the events in which Hamlet had exhibited his decision. But, even in his own account, the beginning of this action was his

"indiscretion," proceeding from sudden and indefinable impulses:—

"Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
 That would not let me sleep."

Wonderfully, indeed, has Shakspeare managed to follow the old history—"How Fengon devised to send Hamlet to the king of England with secret letters to have him put to death, and how Hamlet, when his companions slept, read the letters, and, instead of them, counterfeited others, willing the king of England to put the two messengers to death,"—without destroying the unity of his own conception of Hamlet.

Mrs. Jameson, in her delightful 'Characteristics of Women,' has sketched the character of Ophelia with all a woman's truth and tenderness. One passage only can we venture to take, for it is an image that to our minds is far better than many words: "Once at Murano, I saw a dove caught in a tempest; perhaps it was young, and either lacked strength of wing to reach its home, or the instinct which teaches to shun the brooding storm; but so it was—and I watched it, pitying, as it flitted, poor bird! hither and thither, with its silver pinions shining against the black thunder-cloud, till, after a few giddy whirls, it fell, blinded, affrighted, and bewildered, into the turbid wave beneath, and was swallowed up for ever. It reminded me then of the fate of Ophelia; and now, when I think of her, I see again before me that poor dove, beating with weary wing, bewildered amid the storm." And why is it, when we think upon the fate of the poor storm-stricken Ophelia, that we never reproach Hamlet? We are certain that it was no "trifling of his favour" that broke her heart. We are assured that his seeming harshness did not sink deep into her spirit. We believe that he loved her more than "forty thousand brothers"—though a very ingenious question has been raised upon that point. And yet she certainly perished through Hamlet and his actions. But we blame him not; for her destiny was involved in his. We cannot avoid transcribing a passage from the article in 'Blackwood's Magazine,' which we have already mentioned: "Soon as we connect her destiny with Hamlet, we know that darkness

is to overshadow her, and that sadness and sorrow will step in between her and the ghost-haunted avenger of his father's murder. Soon as our pity is excited for her, it continues gradually to deepen; and, when she appears in her madness, we are not more prepared to weep over all its most pathetic movements than we afterwards are to hear of her death. Perhaps the description of that catastrophe by the Queen is poetical rather than dramatic; but its exquisite beauty prevails, and Ophelia, dying and dead, is still the same Ophelia that first won our love. Perhaps the very forgetfulness of her, throughout the remainder of the play, leaves the soul at full liberty to dream of the departed. She has passed away from the earth like a beautiful air—a delightful dream. There would have been no place for her in the agitation and tempest of the final catastrophe."

Garrick omitted the grave-diggers. He had the terror of Voltaire before his eyes. The English audience compelled their restoration. Was it that "the groundlings" could not endure the loss of the ten waistcoats which the clown had divested himself of, time out of mind?—or, was there in this scene something that brought Hamlet home to the humblest, in the large reach of his universal philosophy? M. Villemain, in his *Essay on Shakspeare*, appears to us utterly to have mistaken this scene*: "Strike not out from the tragedy of 'Hamlet,' as Garrick had attempted to do, the labours and the pleasantries of the grave-diggers. Be present at this terrible buffoonery; and you will behold terror and gaiety rapidly moving an immense audience. . . . Youth and beauty contemplate with insatiable curiosity images of decay, and minute details of death; and then the uncouth pleasantries which are blended with the action of the chief personages seem from time to time to relieve the spectators from the weight which oppresses them, and shouts of laughter burst from every seat. Attentive to this spectacle, the coldest countenances alternately manifest their gloom or their gaiety; and even the statesman

smiles at the sarcasm of the grave-digger who can distinguish between the skull of a courtier and a buffoon." This may be the Hamlet of the theatre; but M. Villemain should have looked at the Hamlet of the closet. The conversation of the clowns before Hamlet comes upon the scene is indeed pleasantry intermixed with sarcasm; but, the moment that Hamlet opens his lips, the meditative richness of his mind is poured out upon us, and he grapples with the most familiar and yet the deepest thoughts of human nature, in a style that is sublime from its very obviousness and simplicity. Where is the terror, unless it be terrible to think of "the house appointed for all living;" and what is to provoke the long peals of laughter, where the grotesque is altogether subordinate to the solemn and the philosophical? It is the entire absorption of the fellow who "has no feeling of his business," by him of "daintier sense" who considers it "too curiously," that makes this scene so impressive to the reader.

Of Hamlet's violence at the grave of Ophelia we think with the critic on Sir Henry Hallford's *Essay*, that it was a real aberration, and not a simulated frenzy. His apparently cold expression, "What, the fair Ophelia!" appears to us to have been an effort of restraint, which for the moment overmastered his reason. In the interval between this "towering passion" and the final catastrophe, Hamlet is thoroughly himself—meditative to excess with Horatio—most acute, playful, but altogether gentlemanly, in the scene with the frivolous courtier. But observe that he forms no plans. He knows the danger which surrounds him; and he still feels with regard to the usurper as he always felt:

"Is't not perfect conscience,
To quit him with this arm?"

But his will is still essentially powerless; and now he yields to the sense of predestination: "If it be now, 't is not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all." The catastrophe is perfectly in accordance with this prostration of Hamlet's mind. It is the result of an accident, produced we know not

* We translate from the last edition of his *Essay*. Paris, 1839.

how. Some one has suggested a polite ceremonial on the part of Hamlet, by which the foils might be exchanged with perfect consistency. We would rather not know how they were exchanged. "The catastrophe," says Johnson, "is not very happily produced; the exchange of weapons is rather an expedient of necessity than a stroke of art. A scheme might easily be formed to kill Hamlet with the dagger, and Laertes with the bowl." No doubt. A tragedy terminated by *chance* appears to be a capital thing for the rule-and-line men to lay hold of. But they forget the poet's purpose. Had Hamlet been otherwise, his will would have been the predominant agent in the catastrophe. The empire of chance would have been over-ruled; the guilty would have been punished; the innocent perhaps would have been spared.

Have we lost anything? Then we should not have had the Hamlet who is "the darling of every country in which the literature of England has been fostered;"* then we should not have had the Hamlet who is "a concentration of all the interests that belong to humanity; in whom there is a more intense conception of individual human life than perhaps in any other human composition: that is, a being with springs of thought, and feeling, and action, deeper than we can search;"† then we should not have had the Hamlet, of whom it has been said, "Hamlet is a name; his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet's brain. What, then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet."‡

* Coleridge.

† Blackwood, vol. ii.

‡ Hazlitt.

CHAPTER V.

OTHELLO.

On the 6th of October, 1621, Thomas Walkley entered at Stationers' Hall 'The Tragedie of Othello, the Moore of Venice.' In 1622, Walkley published the edition for which he had thus claimed the copy. It is, as was usual with the separate plays, a small quarto, and it bears the following title:—'The Tragedy of Othello, the Moore of Venice. As it hath beene diverse times acted at the Globe, and at the Black-Friars, by his Majesties Servants. Written by William Shakespeare.' It contains, also, a prefatory address, which is curious:—"The Stationer to the Reader. To set forth a book without an Epistle were like to the old English proverb, *a blue coat without a badge*; and the author being dead, I thought good to take that piece of work upon me: to commend it I will not: for that which is good, I hope every man will commend, without entreaty: and I am the bolder, because the author's name is sufficient to vent his work. Thus leaving every one to the liberty of judgment, I have ventured to print this play, and leave

it to the general censure. Yours, Thomas Walkley."

'The Tragedie of Othello, the Moore of Venice,' commences on page 310 of the Tragedies in the first folio collection. It extends to page 339; and after it follow, 'Antony and Cleopatra,' and 'Cymbeline.' It is not entered at Stationers' Hall by the proprietors of the folio edition, which affords some presumption that Walkley was legally entitled to his copy. But it is by no means certain to our minds that Walkley's edition was published before the folio. The usual date of that edition is, as our readers know, 1623; but there is a copy in existence bearing the date of 1622. We have, however, no doubt, that the copy of 'Othello' in the folio was printed from a manuscript copy, without reference to the quarto; for there are typographical errors in the folio, arising, no doubt, from illegibility in the manuscript, which would certainly have been avoided had the copy been compared with an edition printed from another manuscript. The fair

inference, therefore, is, that the 'Othello' of the folio was printed off before the quarto of 1622 appeared. Had it been the last play in the book, we should have retained the same opinion, from internal evidence. As two plays succeed it in the volume, we are strengthened in the belief that the original quarto and folio editions were printing at one and the same time. The folio edition is regularly divided into acts and scenes; the quarto edition has not a single indication of any subdivision in the acts, and omits the division between Acts II. and III. The folio edition contains 163 lines which are not found in the quarto, and these some of the most striking in the play: the number of lines found in the quarto which are not in the folio do not amount to 10.

The date of the first production of 'Othello' is settled as near as we can desire it to be. The play certainly belongs to the most vigorous period of Shakspeare's intellect—"at its very point of culmination." Chalmers, upon the very questionable belief that the expression *new heraldry* refers to the creation by James I. of the order of baronets, gave it to 1614; Malone, in the early editions of his 'Essay,' to 1611; Drake, to 1612. In the later edition of Malone's 'Essay,' published by Boswell, in 1821, Malone says, without any explanation, "*we know* it was acted in 1604, and I have therefore placed it in that year." Mr. Collier, however, has been able most satisfactorily to place it two years earlier. There are detailed accounts preserved at Bridgewater House, in the handwriting of Sir Arthur Mainwaring, of the expenses incurred by Sir Thomas Egerton, afterwards Lord Ellesmere, in entertaining Queen Elizabeth and her court three days at Harefield. Amongst the entries in these accounts is the following:—

"6 Aug. 1602. Rewardes to the
Vaulters, Players, and
Dauncers. Of this £10
to Burbidge's players of
Othello 64 18 10."

Burbidge's players were those of the Blackfriars and Globe—Shakspeare's company. Mr. Collier adds, "Perhaps it is not too much to

presume that the dramas represented on these joyous occasions for the amusement of Elizabeth were usually new and popular performances. 'Othello' was unquestionably popular, and most likely new, in 1602."*

When Shakspeare first became acquainted with the 'Moor of Venice' of Giraldo Cinthi (whether in the original Italian, or the French translation, or in one of the little story-books that familiarized the people with the romance and the poetry of the south), he saw in that novel *the scaffolding* of 'Othello.' There was formerly in Venice a valiant Moor, says the story. It came to pass that a virtuous lady of wonderful beauty, named Desdemona, became enamoured of his great qualities and noble virtues. The Moor loved her in return, and they were married in spite of the opposition of the lady's friends. It happened too (says the story) that the senate of Venice appointed the Moor to the command of Cyprus, and that his lady determined to accompany him thither. Amongst the officers who attended upon the General was an ensign, of the most agreeable person, but of the most depraved nature. The wife of this man was the friend of Desdemona, and they spent much of their time together. The wicked ensign became violently enamoured of Desdemona; but she, whose thoughts were wholly engrossed by the Moor, was utterly regardless of the ensign's attentions. His love then became terrible hate, and he resolved to accuse Desdemona to her husband of infidelity, and to connect with the accusation a captain of Cyprus. That officer, having struck a sentinel, was discharged from his command by the Moor; and Desdemona, interested in his favour, endeavoured to reinstate him in her husband's good opinion. The Moor said one day to the ensign, that his wife was so importunate for the restoration of the officer, that he must take him back. "If you would open your eyes, you would see plainer," said the ensign. The romance-writer continues to display the perfidious intrigues of the ensign against Desdemona. He steals a handkerchief which

* 'New Particulars,' &c.

the Moor had given her, employing the agency of his own child. He contrives with the Moor to murder the captain of Cyprus, after he has made the credulous husband listen to a conversation to which he gives a false colour and direction; and, finally, the Moor and the guilty officer destroy Desdemona together, under circumstances of great brutality. The crime is, however, concealed, and the Moor is finally betrayed by his accomplice.

Mr. Dunlop, in his 'History of Fiction,' has pointed out the material differences between the novel and the tragedy. He adds, "In all these important variations, Shakspeare has improved on his original. In a few other particulars he has deviated from it with less judgment; in most respects he has adhered with close imitation. The characters of Iago, Desdemona, and Cassio are taken from Cinthio with scarcely a shade of difference. The obscure hints and various artifices of the villain to raise suspicion in the Moor are the same in the novel and the drama." M. Guizot, with the eye of real criticism, has seen somewhat further than Mr. Dunlop. "There was wanting in the narrative of Cinthio the poetical genius which furnished the actors—which created the individuals—which imposed upon each a figure and a character—which made us see their actions, and listen to their words—which presented their thoughts and penetrated their sentiments:—that vivifying power which summons events to arise, to progress, to expand, to be completed:—that creative breath which, breathing over the past, calls it again into being, and fills it with a present and imperishable life:—this was the power which Shakspeare alone possessed, and by which, out of a forgotten novel, he has made 'Othello.'"

Before we can be said to understand the idea of Shakspeare in the composition of 'Othello,' we must disabuse ourselves of some of the commonplace principles upon which he has been interpreted. The novel, be it observed, is a very intelligible and consistent story, of wedded happiness, of unlawful and unrequited attachment, of revenge growing out of disappointment, of jealousy

too easily abused, of confederacy with the abuser, of most brutal and guilty violence, of equally base falsehood and concealment. This is a story in which we see nothing out of the common course of wickedness; nothing which licentious craft might not prompt, and frenzied passion adopt. The Iago of the tragedy, it is said, has not sufficient motives for his crimes. Mr. Skottowe tells us that in the novel, except as a means of vengeance on Desdemona, the infliction of pain upon the Moor forms no part of the treacherous officer's design. But, with regard to the play, he informs us, that it is surely straining the matter beyond the limits of probability to attribute Iago's detestation of Othello to causes so inadequate and vague as the dramatist has assigned*. We have here the two principles upon which the novelist and the dramatist worked thoroughly at issue; and the one is to be called natural, and the other unnatural. The one would have produced such an 'Othello' as is cleverly described in the introduction to a French translation of the play recently published†: in which the nature of jealousy and all its cruel effects would have been explained, with great pomp of language, by a confidante in an introductory monologue; and the same subject would have served for a continued theme, until the fatal conclusion, which was long foreseen, of an amiable wife becoming the victim of a cruel oppressor. This is the Zaire of Voltaire. Upon the other principle, we have no explanations, no regular progress of what is most palpable in human action. We have the "motiveless malignity" of Iago,—“a being next to devil, and only not quite devil, and yet a character which Shakspeare has attempted and executed without scandal,”‡ as the main spring of all the fearful events which issue out of the unequal contest between the powers of grossness and purity, of falsehood and truth. This is the Othello of Shakspeare.

If it had been within the compass of

* 'The Life of Shakspeare.' By Augustine Skottowe. Vol. ii. p. 76.

† 'Chefs-d'Œuvre de Shakspeare. Tome ii. Paris, 1839.

‡ Coleridge.

Shakspeare's great scheme of the exposition of human actions and the springs of action, to have made Iago a supernatural incarnation of the principle of evil, he would not have drawn him very differently from what he is. In all essentials he is "only not quite devil." He is very much less "than archangel ruined." Milton, when he paints his Satan as about to plunge our first parents in irretrievable misery, makes him exhibit "signs of remorse :"—

———"Should I at your harmless innocence

Melt, as I do, yet public reason just,
Honour and empire with revenge enlarged,
By conquering this new world, compels me now

To do what else, though damn'd, I should abhor.

So spake the Fiend, and with necessity,
The tyrant's plea, excused his devilish deeds."

When Iago beholds a picture of happiness, not much inferior to that upon which the Satan of Milton looked, he has no compunctious visitings at the prospect of destroying it :—

———"Oh, you are well tuned now !

But I'll set down the pegs that make this music,

As honest as I am."

But there is another great poetical creation to which Iago bears more resemblance—the Mephistophiles of Goethe. Take away the supernatural power in Mephistophiles, and the sense of the supernatural power in Faust, and the actions of the human fiend and of the real fiend are reduced to pretty much the same standard. It could not be otherwise. Goethe, to make the incarnation of the evil principle intelligible in its dealing with human affairs, could only paint what Shakspeare has painted—a being passionless, self-possessed, unsympathizing, sceptical of all truth and purity, intellectually gross and sensual,—of a will uncontrolled by fear for himself or respect for others,—the abstract of the reasoning power in the highest state of activity, but without love, without veneration, without hope, unspiritualized, earthy. Mephistophiles and Iago have this in com-

mon, also, that they each seek to destroy their victims through their affections, and each is successful in the attempt. If Shakspeare had made Iago actually exhibit the vulgar attributes of the fiend, when Othello exclaims—

"I look down towards his feet"—

would the character have been a particle more real ? Fiends painted by men are but reflections of the baser principles of humanity. Shakspeare embodied those principles in Iago ; and, it being granted that great talent combined with an utter destitution of principle, and a complete denudation of sympathy, has produced the monsters which history has described, who shall say that the character is exaggerated ?

The list of "persons represented," affixed to the folio edition of Othello, and called "the names of the actors," is as little wanted for the information of the reader of this tragedy as any preparatory *scenic description* of the characters. In this list we have "Iago, a villain,"—"Roderigo, a gull'd gentleman." But Shakspeare has given us very clear indications by which to know the gull from the rogue. We have not read a dozen sentences before we feel the intellectual vigour of Iago, and the utter want of honour, which he is not ashamed to avow. He parries in an instant the complaint of Roderigo,—

"That thou, Iago, who hast had my purse,"—

and commands a sympathy with his own complaints against the Moor. He is not nice in the avowal of his principles of action :—

"In following him I follow but myself."

He lays bare, without the slightest apprehension, the selfish motives upon which he habitually acts. And is not this nature ? Roderigo, blinded by his passion and vanity, overlooks, as all men do under similar circumstances, the risk which he himself runs from such a confederate ; and Iago knows that he will overlook it. He never makes a similar exposition of himself directly to persons of nice honour and sensitive morality. To Othello he is the hypocrite :—

——— "I lack iniquity,
Sometime to do me service."
And therefore, in Othello's opinion,
"A man he is of honesty and trust."

And even to the "gull'd gentleman," while he is counselling the most abominable wickedness, he is a sort of moralist, up to the point of securing attention and belief:—"our bodies are our gardens." When he is alone, he revels in the pride of his intellect:—

"Thus do I ever make my fool my purse:
For I mine own *gain'd knowledge* should profane,
If I would time expend with such a snipe,
But for my sport and profit."

To Desdemona, in the first scene at Cyprus, he is "nothing if not critical," according to his own account, but retailing "old fond paradoxes," to conceal his real opinions. When he tasks his understanding to meet Desdemona's demand of "What praise couldst thou bestow on a deserving woman indeed?" he exhibits the very perfection of satirical verse,—the precise model of the poetry of smartness and antithesis,—the light without warmth of cleverness without feeling. To Cassio, a frank and generous soldier, somewhat easily tempted to folly, and with morals loose enough, but not so loose as to destroy his native love of truth and purity, he ventures to exhibit himself more openly. The dialogue in the third scene of the second act, where they discourse of Desdemona, is a key to the habitual grossness of his imagination. His sarcasm to Cassio after the anger of Othello, "As I am an honest man, I had thought you had received some bodily wound; there is more sense in that than in reputation,"—discloses the utter absence from his mind of the principle of honour. And then, again, he can accommodate himself to all the demands of the frankest joviality:—

"And let me the canakin clink, clink."

Other dramatists would have made him gloomy and morose, but Shakspeare knew that the boon companion, and the cheat and traitor, are not essentially distinct characters. In these lighter demonstrations of his real nature we have seen the clever scoundrel

and the passionless sensualist tainted with impurity to the extremest depth of his will and his understanding. We have seen, too, at the very commencement of the play, his hatred to Othello exhibited in the rousing up of Desdemona's father. We have learned something, also, of the motive of this hatred—the preferment of Cassio:—

——— "Now, sir, be judge yourself,
Whether I in any just term am affined
To love the Moor."

But it remained for Iago himself, thinking aloud, or, as we call it, soliloquizing, to disclose the entire scope of his villainy. He is to get Cassio's place, and "to abuse Othello's ear." To justify even to himself this second fiendish determination, he shows us, as Coleridge has beautifully expressed it, "the motive hunting of a motiveless malignity." We may well add with Coleridge, "how awful it is!" To understand the confidence with which Iago exclaims, "I have it, it is engender'd," we must examine the elements of Othello's character.

Iago paints the Moor with bitter satire, as one "loving his own pride and purposes." He exhibits him lofty and magniloquent, using "a bombast circumstance." This is the mode in which a cold, calculating man of the world looks upon the imaginative man. The practical men, as they are called, regard with dislike those who habitually bring high thoughts and forcible expressions into the commerce of life. And yet Iago is compelled to do justice to the Moor's high talent:—

"Another of his fathom they have none,
To lead their business."

The frankness and generosity of the Moor, on the contrary, is a subject for his utter scorn. Here he has no sympathy with him:—

"The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to
be so;
And will as tenderly be led by the nose,
As asses are."

Again,—

"The Moor—howbeit that I endure him not—
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature."

It is his dependence upon this constant, loving, noble nature,—it is upon Othello's freedom from all low suspicion, that Iago relies for his power to

“Make the Moor thank me, love me, and reward me,
For making him egregiously an ass,
And practising upon his peace and quiet
Even to madness.”

But let Othello speak for himself. Not vain, but proud;—relying upon himself, his birth, his actions, he is calm at the prospect of any injury that Brabantio can do him. He is bold when he has to confront those who come as his enemies:—

————— “I must be found;
My parts, my title, and my perfect soul,
Shall manifest me rightly.”

When the old senator exclaims, “down with him—thief!” how beautiful is his self-command!—

“Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.”

It was his forbearance and self-restraint, bottomed upon the most enthusiastic energy, that made him a hero. When he is wrought into frenzy, Iago himself is surprised at the storm which he has produced; and he looks upon the tempest of passion as a child does upon some machine which he has mischievously set in motion for damage and destruction, but which under guidance is a beautiful instrument of usefulness. “Can he be angry?” Ludovico, in the same way, does justice to his habitual equanimity:—

“Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate
Call all-in-all sufficient? Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake?”

The senate scene is the triumph of Othello's perfect simplicity and fearless enthusiasm:—

“I think this tale would win my daughter too.”

And then his affection for Desdemona. Before the assembled senators he puts on no show of violence—no reality, and, unquestionably, no affectation, of warmth and tenderness:—

“She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd.
And I loved her that she did pity them.”

But when the meeting comes at Cyprus, after their separation and their danger, the depth of his affection bursts forth in irrepressible words:—

————— “If it were now to die,
'T were now to be most happy; for, I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute,
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate.”

Such are the materials upon which Iago has to work in Othello. But, had Desdemona been otherwise than she was, his success would not have been so assured. Let us dwell for a moment upon the elementary character of this pure and gentle being.

Desdemona's father first describes her:—

————— “A maiden never bold;
Of spirit so still and quiet, that her motion
Blush'd at herself.”

Yet upon her very first appearance she does not shrink from avowing the strength of her affections:—

“That I love the Moor to live with him,
My downright violence and storm of fortunes
May trumpet to the world.”

But she immediately adds the reason for this:—

————— “*My heart's subdued
Even to the very quality of my lord.*”

The *impressibility* of Desdemona is her distinguishing characteristic. With this key, the tale of Othello's wooing is a most consistent one. The timid girl is brought into immediate contact with the earnest warrior. She hears of wonders most remote from her experience;—caves and deserts, rocks and hills, in themselves marvels to an inhabitant of the city of the sea,—

————— “Of most disastrous chances;
Of moving accidents by flood and field.”

How exquisite is the domestic picture which follows:—

“But still the house affairs would draw her
thence;
Which ever as she could with haste despatch,
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse.”

But this impressibility, this exceeding sym-

pathy arising out of the tenderness of her nature, is under the control of the most perfect purity. Iago does full justice to this purity, whilst he sees that her kindness of heart may be abused:—

“For ’t is most easy
The inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit; she’s framed as fruitful
As the free elements.”

Her confidence in the power which she possesses over Othello is the result of the perfect sympathy which she has bestowed and received. And her zeal in friendship, without a thought that she might be mistaken, has its root in the same confiding nature:—

“I give thee warrant of thy place: assure thee,
If I do vow a friendship I’ll perform it
To the last article.”

The equivocation about the handkerchief is the result of the same impressibility. She is terrified out of her habitual candour. The song of ‘Willow,’ and the subsequent dialogue with Emilia, are evidences of the same subjection of the mind to external impressions. But her unassailable purity is above all. “I do not think there is any such woman,” is one of those minute touches which we in vain seek for in any other writer but Shakspeare.

Understanding, then, the native characters of Othello and Desdemona, we shall appreciate the marvellous skill with which Shakspeare has conducted the machinations of Iago. If the novel of Cinthio had fallen into common hands to be dramatized, and the dramatist had chosen to depart from the motive of revenge against Desdemona which there actuates the villain, the plot would probably have taken this course:—The Desdemona would have been somewhat less pure than our Desdemona; the Cassio would have been somewhat more presumptuous than our Cassio, and have not felt for Desdemona the religious veneration which he feels; the Othello would have been “easily jealous,” and would have done something “in hate,” but not “all in honour,” as our Othello. It is a part of the admirable knowledge of human nature

possessed by Shakspeare, that Iago does not, even for a moment, entertain the thought of tampering with the virtue of Desdemona, either through Cassio, or Roderigo, or any other instrument. Coleridge has boldly and truly said that “Othello does not kill Desdemona in jealousy, but in a conviction forced upon him by the almost superhuman art of Iago—such a conviction as any man would and must have entertained who had believed Iago’s honesty as Othello did. We, the audience, know that Iago is a villain from the beginning; but, in considering the essence of the Shakspearean Othello, we must perseveringly place ourselves in his situation, and under his circumstances.”

But Othello was not only betrayed by his reliance on “Iago’s honesty,” but also by his confidence in Iago’s wisdom:—

“This fellow’s of exceeding honesty,
And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit,
Of human dealings.”

Again,

“O thou art wise; ’t is certain.”

When Othello thus bows his own lofty nature before the grovelling but most acute worldly intellect of Iago, his habitual view of “all qualities” had been clouded by the breath of the slanderer. His confidence in purity and innocence had been destroyed. The sensual judgment of “human dealings” had taken the place of the spiritual. The enthusiastic love and veneration of his wife had been painted to him as the result of gross passion:—

“Not to affect many proposed matches,” &c.

His belief in the general prevalence of virtuous motives and actions had been degraded to a reliance on the libertine’s creed that all are impure:—

“there’s millions now alive,” &c.

When the innocent and the high-minded submit themselves to the tutelage of the man of the world, as he is called, the process of mental change is precisely that produced in the mind of Othello. The poetry of life is gone. On them never more

“The freshness of the heart can fall like dew.”

They abandon themselves to the betrayer,

and they prostrate themselves before the energy of his "gain'd knowledge." They feel that in their own original powers of judgment they have no support against the dogmatism, and it may be the ridicule, of experience. This is the course with the young when they fall into the power of the tempter. But was not Othello in all essentials *young*? Was he not of an enthusiastic temperament, confiding, loving,—most sensitive to opinion,—jealous of his honour,—truly wise, had he trusted to his own pure impulses?—But he was most weak, in adopting an evil opinion against his own faith, and conviction, and proof, in his reliance upon the honesty and judgment of a man whom he really doubted and had never proved. Yet this is the course by which the highest and noblest intellects are too often subjected to the dominion of the subtle understanding and the unbridled will. It is an unequal contest between the principles that are struggling for mastery in the individual man, when the attributes of the serpent and the dove are separated, and become conflicting. The wisdom which belonged to Othello's enthusiastic temperament

was his confidence in the truth and purity of the being with whom his life was bound up, and his general reliance upon the better part of human nature, in his judgment of his friend. When the confidence was destroyed by the craft of his deadly enemy, his sustaining power was also destroyed;—the balance of his sensitive temperament was lost;—his enthusiasm became wild passion;—his new belief in the dominion of grossness over the apparently pure and good shaped itself into outrage; his honour lent itself to schemes of cruelty and revenge. But, even amidst the whirlwind of this passion, we every now and then hear something which sounds as the softest echo of love and gentleness. Perhaps in the whole compass of the Shakspearean pathos there is nothing deeper than "But yet the pity of it, Iago! Oh, Iago, the pity of it, Iago!" It is the contemplated murder of Desdemona which thus tears his heart. But his "disordered power, engendered within itself to its own destruction," hurries on the catastrophe. We would ask, with Coleridge, "As the curtain drops, which do we pity the most?"

CHAPTER VI.

KING LEAR.

THE first edition of 'King Lear' was published in 1608; its title was as follows:—'Mr. William Shake-speare his True Chronicle History of the Life and Death of King Lear, and his three Daughters. With the unfortunate Life of Edgar, Sonne and Heire to the Earle of Glocester, and his sullen and assumed Humour of Tom of Bedlam. As it was plaid before the King's Majesty at White-Hall, uppon S. Stephens Night; in Christmas Hollidaies. By his Majesties Servants playing usually at the Globe on the Banck-side. Printed for Nathaniel Butter, and are to be sold at his Shop in Paul's Church-yard at the Signe of the Pied Bull

neere St. Austins Gate, 1608.' Two other editions were published by Butter in the same year. It is remarkable that a play of which three editions were demanded in one year should not have been reprinted till it was collected in the folio of 1623. Other of the plays, which were originally published in a separate form during the poet's life-time, were frequently reprinted before the folio collection. Whether 'Lear' was piratical, or whether a limited publication was allowed, it is clear, we think, that by some interference the continued publication was stopped.

In the folio text of 'Lear,' as compared with the text of the quarto, there are verbal

corrections, and additions and omissions; but in the quarto text of that play the metrical arrangement is one mass of confusion. This circumstance appears to us conclusive that these quarto copies could not have been printed from the author's manuscript; and yet they might have been printed from a genuine playhouse copy. The text of the folio, in one material respect, differs considerably from that of the quartos. Large passages which are found in the quartos are omitted in the folio: there are, indeed, some lines found in the folio which are not in the quartos, amounting to about fifty. These are scattered passages, not very remarkable when detached, but for the most part essential to the progress of the action or to the development of character. On the other hand, the lines found in the quartos which are not in the folio amount to as many as two hundred and twenty-five; and they comprise one entire scene, and one or two of the most striking connected passages in the drama. It would be easy to account for these omissions by the assumption that in the folio edition the original play was cut down by the editors; for 'Lear,' without the omissions, is one amongst the longest of Shakspeare's plays. But this theory would require us to assume, also, that the additions to the folio were made by the editors. These comprise several such minute touches as none but the hand of the master could have superadded.

The period of the first production of 'Lear' may be fixed with tolerable certainty. We collect, from the registers of the Stationers' Company, that 'Lear' was played before King James, at Whitehall, upon St. Stephen's night, in the year 1606—that is, on the 26th of December. Here is the limit in one direction. In the other direction we have the publication, in 1603, of Harsnet's 'Declaration of egregious Popish Impostures,' from which book Shakspeare undoubtedly derived some materials which he employed in the assumed madness of Edgar. It is pretty clear, also, from two passages in the text of the quarto editions, that the author or the actors of the tragedy, "as it was played before the king's majesty," were careful to make two minute changes which would be agreeable to James.

After the accession of James, when he was proclaimed King of *Great Britain*, it was usual to merge the name of England in that of *Britain*. Bacon thus explains the completion of the old prophecy, "When hempe is sponne, England's donne." The ancient metrical saying, "Fy, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an *English* man," becomes in 'Lear,' "I smell the blood of a *British* man;" and in the quarto editions (Act IV., Scene 6) we have—

"And give the letters, which thou find'st about
me,
To Edmund, earl of Gloster; seek him out
Upon the *British* party."

The allusions derived from Harsnet's book fix the date of the tragedy as near as we can desire it to be fixed. All that we can hope for in these matters is an approximation to a date. It is sufficient for us to be confirmed, through such a fact, in the belief, derived from internal evidence, that 'Lear' was produced at that period when the genius of Shakspeare was "at its very point of culmination."

The story of 'Lear' belongs to the popular literature of Europe. It is a pretty episode in the fabulous chronicles of Britain; and, whether invented by the monkish historians, or transplanted into our annals from some foreign source, is not very material. In the 'Gesta Romanorum,' the same story is told of Theodosius, "a wise emperor in the city of Rome." Douce has published this story from the manuscript in the Harleian Collection. It may be sufficient to give the beginning of this curious narrative, to show how clearly all the histories have been derived from a common source:—

"Theodosius regned, a wys emperour in the cite of Rome, and myghti he was of power; the whiche emperour had thre doughters. So hit liked to this emperour to knowe which of his doughters lovid him best. And tho he seid to the eldest doughter, how moche lovist thou me? fforsoth, quod she, more than I do myself, therefore, quod he, thou shalt be hily avaunsed, and married her to a riche and myghti kyng. Tho he cam to the secund, and seid to her, doughter, how moche lovist thou me? As moche forsoth, she seid, as I do myself. So the emperour

married her to a duc. And tho he seid to the third doughter, how moche lovist thou me? fforsoth, quod she, as moche as ye beth worthi, and no more. Tho seid the emperour, doughter, sith thou lovist me no more, thou shalt not be married so richely as thi susters beth. And tho he married her to an erle."

The French have a famous romance entitled 'La tres elegante delicieuse melliflue et tres plaisante hystoire du tres victorieux & excellentissime Roy Perceforest Roy de la grant Bretagne,' of the veritable contents of which an account will be found in the 'Censura Literaria,' vol. viii. These chronicles, according to Sir Egerton Brydges, "begin with the foundation of Troy, which they affirm to have been in the third age of the world, and that it was taken while Abdon was judge over Israel. The travels of Brutus, and his wars in Great Britain and Aquitaine, follow, which took place while Saul reigned in Judea, and Aristeus in Lacedemon. His grandson, Rududribas, father of the celebrated Bladud, founded the ancient city of Canterbury, which occurred during the time in which Haggai, Amos, and Joel prophesied. These curious circumstances are succeeded by the story of Lear (son to Bladud) and his three daughters, which was in the time of Isaiah and Hosea, at which period also the city of Rome was founded." The exact chronology of the romancers and chroniclers is well worthy attention. Geoffrey of Monmouth is quite as precise as Pierceforest: "At this time flourished the prophets Isaiah and Hosea, and Rome was built upon the eleventh of the Calends of May, by the two brothers Romulus and Remus." With such unquestionable authority for the date of the story of Lear, well may Malone have been shocked when Edgar says, "Nero was an angler in the lake of darkness;" and we ought to be grave when we are also informed, with the most perfect gravity, "Nero is introduced in the present play above eight hundred years before he was born." Shakspeare found the story in his favourite Holinshed; and he probably did not trouble himself to refer to Geoffrey of Monmouth, from whom Holinshed abridged it. We subjoin the legend as told by Holinshed:—

"Leir, the son of Baldud, was admitted ruler over the Britains in the year of the world 3105. At what time Joas reigned as yet in Juda. This Leir was a prince of noble demeanour, governing his land and subjects in great wealth. He made the town of Cairleir, now called Leicester, which standeth upon the river of Dore. It is writ that he had by his wife three daughters, without other issue, whose names were Gonorilla, Regan, and Cordilla, which daughters he greatly loved, but especially the youngest, Cordilla, far above the two elder.

"When this Leir was come to great years, and began to wear unwieldy through age, he thought to understand the affections of his daughters towards him, and prefer her whom he best loved to the succession of the kingdom; therefore, he first asked Gonorilla, the eldest, how well she loved him: the which, calling her gods to record, protested that she loved him more than her own life, which by right and reason should be most dear unto her; with which answer the father, being well pleased, turned to the second, and demanded of her how well she loved him? which answered (confirming her sayings with great oaths) that she loved him more than tongue can express, and far above all other creatures in the world.

"Then called he his youngest daughter, Cordilla, before him, and asked of her what account she made of him: unto whom she made this answer as followeth:—Knowing the great love and fatherly zeal you have always borne towards me (for the which, that I may not answer you otherwise than I think, and as my conscience leadeth me), I protest to you that I have always loved you, and shall continually while I live love you, as my natural father; and if you would more understand of the love that I bear you, ascertain yourself, that so much as you have, so much you are worth, and so much I love you, and no more.

"The father, being nothing content with this answer, married the two eldest daughters, the one unto the duke of Cornwall, named Henninus, and the other unto the duke of Albania, called Maglanus; and betwixt them, after his death, he willed and ordained his land should be divided, and the one-half thereof should be immediately assigned unto them in hand; but for the third daughter, Cordilla, he reserved nothing.

"Yet it fortuneth that one of the princes of Gallia (which now is called France), whose name was Aganippus, hearing of the beauty, woman-

hood, and good conditions of the said Cordilla, desired to have her in marriage, and sent over to her father, requiring that he might have her to wife; to whom answer was made, that he might have his daughter, but for any dowry he could have none, for all was promised and assured to her other sisters already.

"Aganippus, notwithstanding this answer of denial to receive anything by way of dower with Cordilla, took her to wife, only moved thereto (I say) for respect of her person and amiable virtues. This Aganippus was one of the twelve kings that ruled Gallia in those days, as in the British history it is recorded. But to proceed: after that Leir was fallen into age, the two dukes that had married his two eldest daughters, thinking it long ere the government of the land did come to their hands, arose against him in armour, and reft from him the governance of the land, upon conditions to be continued for term of life: by the which he was put to his portion; that is, to live after a rate assigned to him for the maintenance of his estate, which in process of time was diminished, as well by Maglanus as by Henninus.

"But the greatest grief that Leir took was to see the unkindness of his daughters, who seemed to think that all was too much which their father had, the same being never so little, in so much that, going from the one to the other, he was brought to that misery that they would allow him only one servant to wait upon him. In the end, such was the unkindness, or, as I may say, the unnaturalness, which he found in his two daughters, notwithstanding their fair and pleasant words uttered in time past, that, being constrained of necessity, he fled the land, and sailed into Gallia, there to seek some comfort of his youngest daughter, Cordilla, whom before he hated.

"The lady Cordilla, hearing he was arrived in poor estate, she first sent to him privately a sum of money to apparel himself withall, and to retain a certain number of servants, that might attend upon him in honourable wise, as appertained to the estate which he had borne. And then, so accompanied, she appointed him to come to the court, which he did, and was so joyfully, honourably, and lovingly received, both by his son-in-law Aganippus, and also by his daughter Cordilla, that his heart was greatly comforted: for he was no less honoured than if he had been king of the whole country himself. Also, after that he had informed his

son-in-law and his daughter in what sort he had been used by his other daughters, Aganippus caused a mighty army to be put in readiness, and likewise a great navy of ships to be rigged to pass over into Britain, with Leir his father-in-law, to see him again restored to his kingdom.

"It was accorded that Cordilla should also go with him to take possession of the land, the which he promised to leave unto her, as his rightful inheritor after his decease, notwithstanding any former grants made unto her sisters, or unto their husbands, in any manner or wise; hereupon, when this army and navy of ships were ready, Leir and his daughter Cordilla, with her husband, took the sea, and, arriving in Britain, fought with their enemies, and discomfited them in battle, in the which Maglanus and Henninus were slain, and then was Leir restored to his kingdom, which he ruled after this by the space of two years, and then died, forty years after he first began to reign. His body was buried at Leicester, in a vault under the channel of the river Dore, beneath the town."

The subsequent fate of Cordelia is also narrated by Holinshed. She became Queen after her father's death; but her nephews "levied war against her, and destroyed a great part of the land, and finally took her prisoner, and laid her fast in ward, wherewith she took such grief, being a woman of a manly courage; and, despairing to recover liberty, there she slew herself." Spenser, in the second book of 'The Fairy Queen,' canto 10, has told the story of Lear and his daughters, in six stanzas, in which he has been content to put in verse, with very slight change or embellishment, the narrative of the chroniclers. The concluding stanza will be a sufficient specimen:—

"So to his crown she him restor'd again,
In which he dy'd, made ripe for death by eld,
And after will'd it should to her remain;
Who peaceably the same long time did weld,
And all men's hearts in due obedience held;
Till that her sisters' children, woxen strong,
Through proud ambition against her rebell'd,
And overcomen, kept in prison long,
Till, weary of that wretched life, herself she
hong."

The story of Lear had unquestionably been dramatised before Shakspeare produced his

tragedy. 'The true Chronicle History of King Leir and his three Daughters, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella, as it hath been divers and sundry times lately acted,' was printed, probably for the first time, in 1605; but there can be no doubt that it belongs to a period some ten, fifteen, or perhaps twenty years earlier. In 1594 an entry was made at Stationers' Hall, of 'The moste famous Chronicle Hystorie of Leire King of England, and his Three Daughters.' Theobald calls this old play "an execrable performance;" Percy, "a very poor and dull performance;" and Capell, "a silly old play." It is certainly all these, when compared with the wonderful production of Shakspeare; but we are by no means certain that it is not as good as half the pieces which occupied the stage, and not unsuccessfully, at the very time that Shakspeare had produced some of his most glorious works. We subjoin a scene which will enable our readers to compare it with the first scene of Shakspeare's 'Lear.'

"*Lear.* Dear Gonoril, kind Regan, sweet Cordelia,

Ye flourishing branches of a kingly stock,
Sprung from a tree that once did flourish
green,

Whose blossoms now are nipt with winter's frost,
And pale grim death doth wait upon my steps,
And summons me unto his next assizes.

Therefore, dear daughters, as ye tender the
safety

Of him that was the cause of your first being,
Resolve a doubt which much molests my mind,
Which of you three to me would prove most
kind;

Which loves me most, and which at my
request

Will soonest yield unto their father's hest.

"*Gonoril.* I hope, my gracious father makes
no doubt

Of any of his daughters' love to him:

Yet, for my part, to show my zeal to you,
Which cannot be in windy words rehears'd,

I prize my love to you at such a rate,

I think my life inferior to my love.

Should you enjoin me for to tie a millstone

About my neck, and leap into the sea,

At your command I willingly would do it:

Yea, for to do you good, I would ascend

The highest turret in all Brittany,

And from the top leap headlong to the ground:

Nay, more, should you appoint me for to marry
The meanest vassal in the spacious world,
Without reply I would accomplish it:

In brief, command whatever you desire,

And, if I fail, no favour I require.

"*Lear.* Oh, how thy words revive my dying
soul!

"*Cordelia.* Oh, how I do abhor this flattery!

"*Lear.* But what saith Regan to her
father's will?

"*Regan.* Oh, that my simple utterance could
suffice

To tell the true intention of my heart,

Which burns in zeal of duty to your grace,

And never can be quench'd, but by desire

To show the same in outward forwardness.

Oh, that there were some other maid that
durst

But make a challenge of her love with me;

I'd make her soon confess she never loved

Her father half so well as I do you.

I then my deeds should prove in plainer case,

How much my zeal aboundeth to your grace:

But for them all, let this one mean suffice

To ratify my love before your eyes:

I have right noble suitors to my love,

No worse than kings, and haply I love one:

Yet, would you have me make my choice anew,

I'd bridle fancy, and be ruled by you.

"*Lear.* Did never Philomel sing so sweet
a note.

"*Cordelia.* Did never flatterer tell so false
a tale.

"*Lear.* Speak now, Cordelia, make my joys
at full,

And drop down nectar from thy honey lips.

"*Cordelia.* I cannot paint my duty forth in
words,

I hope my deeds shall make report for me:

But look what love the child doth owe the
father,

The same to you I bear, my gracious lord.

"*Gonoril.* Here is an answer answerless
indeed:

Were you my daughter, I should scarcely
brook it.

"*Regan.* Dost thou not blush, proud pea-
cock as thou art,

To make our father such a slight reply?

"*Lear.* Why how now, minion, are you
grown so proud?

Doth our dear love make you thus peremptory?

What, is your love become so small to us,

As that you scorn to tell us what it is?

Do you love us, as every child doth love
Their father? True indeed, as some,
Who by disobedience short their father's days,
And so would you; some are so father-sick,
That they make means to rid them from the
world;

And so would you: some are indifferent,
Whether their aged parents live or die;
And so are you. But, didst thou know,
proud girl,
What care I had to foster thee to this,
Ah, then thou wouldst say as thy sisters do:
Our life is less, than love we owe to you.

"*Cordelia*. Dear father, do not so mistake
my words,
Nor my plain meaning be misconstrued;
My tongue was never used to flattery.

"*Gonoril*. You were not best say I flatter:
if you do,
My deeds shall shew, I flatter not with you.
I love my father better than thou canst.

"*Cordelia*. The praise were great, spoke
from another's mouth:
But it should seem your neighbours dwell
far off.

"*Regan*. Nay, here is one, that will confirm
as much
As she hath said, both for myself and her.
I say, thou dost not wish my father's good.

"*Cordelia*. Dear father——

"*Lear*. Peace, bastard imp, no issue of
king Lear,
I will not hear thee speak one tittle more.
Call not me father, if thou love thy life,
Nor these thy sisters once presume to name:
Look for no help henceforth from me or mine;
Shift as thou wilt, and trust unto thyself:
My kingdom will I equally divide
'Twixt thy two sisters to their royal dower,
And will bestow them worthy their deserts:
This done, because thou shalt not have the hope
To have a child's part in the time to come,
I presently will dispossess myself,
And set up these upon my princely throne.

"*Gonoril*. I ever thought that pride would
have a fall.

"*Regan*. Plain-dealing sister: your beauty
is so sheen,
You need no dowry, to make you be a queen.

[*Exeunt LEAR, GONORIL, REGAN.*"]

Mr. Skottowe has, with great diligence and
minuteness, attempted to trace Shakspeare in
what he is supposed to have borrowed from

the old play, and also in the points of
difference. Our readers will easily imagine,
from the extract with which we have furnished
them, that Shakspeare had, at all events, to
create the poetical diction of 'Lear,' without
any obligation to his lumbering predecessor.
In the conduct of the plot he is equally
original. It may be sufficient for us to state
that of the madness of Lear we have no trace
in the old play; and that, like the chronicle,
it ends with the triumphant restoration of
Lear to his kingdom.

There is a ballad, printed in Percy's
'Reliques,' on the story of Lear. It is
without a date, and Percy says, "Here is
found the hint of Lear's madness, which the
old chronicles do not mention, as also the
extravagant cruelty exercised on him by his
daughters. In the death of Lear they like-
wise very exactly coincide. The misfortune
is, that there is nothing to assist us in
ascertaining the date of the ballad but what
little evidence arises from within." We print
the passages to which Percy alludes:—

"Her father, old king Leir, this while

With his two daughters staid;
Forgetful of their promised loves,
Full soon the same decay'd;

And living in queen Ragan's court,
The eldest of the twain,
She took from him his chiefest means,
And most of all his train.

"For, whereas twenty men were wont
To wait with bended knee,
She gave allowance but to ten,
And after scarce to three:
Nay, one she thought too much for him:
So took she all away,
In hope that in her court, good king,
He would no longer stay.

"'Am I rewarded thus,' quoth he,

'In giving all I have
Unto my children, and to beg
For what I lately gave?

I'll go unto my Gonorell;
My second child, I know,
Will be more kind and pitiful,
And will relieve my woe.'

"Full fast he hies then to her court;
Where when she hears his moan,
Return'd him answer, That she griev'd
That all his means were gone:

But no way could relieve his wants;
 Yet if that he would stay
 Within her kitchen, he should have
 What scullions gave away.

* * * *

"And calling to remembrance then
 His youngest daughter's words,
 That said, the duty of a child
 Was all that love affords;
 But doubting to repair to her,
 Whom he had banish'd so,
Grew frantic mad; for in his mind
 He bore the wounds of woe:
 "Which made him rend his milk-white locks
 And tresses from his head,
 And all with blood bestain his cheeks,
 With age and honour spread;
 To hills and woods and wat'ry founts
 He made his hourly moan,
 Till hills and woods and senseless things
 Did seem to sigh and groan.

* * * *

"And so to England came with speed,
 To re-possess king Leir,
 And drive his daughters from their thrones
 By his Cordelia dear:
 Where she, true-hearted noble queen,
 Was in the battle slain:
 Yet he, good king, in his old days,
 Possess'd his crown again.
 "But when he heard Cordelia's death,
 Who dy'd indeed for love
 Of her dear father, in whose cause
 She did this battle move;
 He swooning fell upon her breast,
 From whence he never parted:
 But on her bosom left his life,
 That was so truly hearted.

"The lords and nobles, when they saw
 The ends of these events,
 The other sisters unto death
 They doomed by consents;
 And being dead, their crowns they left
 Unto the next of kin:
 Thus have you seen the fall of pride,
 And disobedient sin."

In Sidney's 'Arcadia' there is a chapter entitled 'The pitiful state and story of the Paphlagonian unkind king, and his kind son, first related by the son, then by the blind father.' This unquestionably furnished the dramatic foundation of Gloster and

Edgar. It may be sufficient for us to give the relation of the "kind son:"—

"This old man, whom I lead, was lately rightful prince of Paphlagonia, by the hard-hearted ungratefulness of a son of his, deprived not only of his kingdom, but of his sight, the riches which nature grants to the poorest creatures; whereby and by other his unnatural dealings, he hath been driven to such griefs, as even now he would have had me to have led him to the top of this rock, thence to cast himself headlong to death; and so would have had me, who received my life of him, to be the worker of his destruction."

Criticism, as far as regards the *very* highest works of art, must always be a failure. What criticism (and in that term we include description and analysis) ever helped us to an adequate notion of the Belvedere Apollo, or the Cartoons of Raffaele? We may try to apply general principles to the particular instances, as far as regards the ideal of such productions; or, what is more common, we may seize upon the salient points of their material and mechanical excellences. If we adopt this comparatively easy and therefore common course, criticism puts on that technical and pedantic form which is the besetting sin of all who attempt to make the great works of painting or sculpture comprehensible by the medium of words. If we take the more difficult path, we are quickly involved in the vague and obscure, and end in explanations without explanation. "The Correggiescity of Correggio," after all, and in sober truth, tells as much as the critics have told us. And is it different with poetry of the very highest order? What criticism, for example, can make the harmony of a very great poem comprehensible to those who have not studied such a poem again and again, till all its scattered lights, and all its broad masses of shadow, are blended into one pervading tint, upon which the mind reposes, through the influence of that mighty power by which the force of contrast is subjected to the higher force of unity? Criticism may, to a certain extent, stimulate us to the appreciation of the great parts of the highest creations of poetical genius; but, in the exact

degree in which it is successful in leading to a comprehension of details, is it injurious to the higher purpose of its vocation—that of illuminating a whole. It is precisely the same with regard to the modes in which even the most tasteful minds attempt to convey impressions to others of the effects of real scenery. There are, probably, recollections lingering around most of us of some combination of natural grandeur or beauty which can never be forgotten—which has moved us even to tears. What can we describe of such scenes? Take a common instance—a calm river sleeping in the moonlight—familiar hills, in their massy outlines looking mountain-like—the well-known village on the river's bank, giving forth its cottage lights, each shining as a star in the depth of the transparent stream. The description of such a scene becomes merely picturesque. It is the *harmony* which cannot be described—the harmony which results from some happy combinations not always, and indeed rarely, present—which has thus invested the commonest things with life-lasting impressions. The “prevailing poet,” in his great productions, converts what is accidental in nature into a principle in art. But the workings of the principle must, to a great extent, be felt and understood, rather than analysed and described.

Hazlitt, applying himself to write a set criticism upon ‘Lear,’ says—“We wish that we could pass this play over, and say nothing about it. All that we can say must fall far short of the subject, or even of what we ourselves conceive of it. To attempt to give a description of the play itself, or of its effect upon the mind, is mere impertinence.” This is not affectation. The “effect upon the mind” which ‘Lear’ produces is the result of combinations too subtle to be described—almost so to be defined to ourselves; and yet, to continue the sentence of Hazlitt, “we must say something.”

There is an English word-joiner—author we will not call him—who has had the temerity to accomplish two things, either of which would have been enough to have conferred upon him a bad immortality. Nahum

Tate has succeeded, to an extent which defies all competition, in degrading the Psalms of David and the ‘Lear’ of Shakspeare to the condition of being tolerated, and perhaps even admired, by the most dull, gross, and anti-poetical capacity. These were not easy tasks; but Nahum Tate has enjoyed more than a century of honour for his labours; and his new versions of the Psalms are still sung on (like the shepherd in Arcadia piped) as if they would never be old, and his ‘Lear’ was ever the ‘Lear’ of the playhouse, until Mr. Macready ventured upon a modern heresy in favour of Shakspeare. To have enjoyed so extensive and lasting a popularity, Nahum Tate must have possessed more than ordinary power in the reduction of the highest things to the vulgar standard. He set about the Metamorphosis of ‘Lear’ with a bold hand, nothing doubting that he had an especial vocation to the office of tumbling that barbaric pile into ruins, for the purpose of building up something compact, and pretty, and modern, after the fashion of the architecture of his own age. He talks, indeed, of his feat, in the way in which the court jeweller talks at the beginning of a new reign, when he pulls the crown to pieces, and re-arranges the emeralds and rubies of our Edwards and Henries according to the newest taste. “It is a heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished, yet so dazzling in their disorder that I soon perceived I had seized a treasure.” We are grateful, however, to Tate for what he has done; for he has enabled us to say something about Shakspeare’s ‘Lear,’ when, without him, we might have shrunk into “expressive silence.” We propose to show what the ‘Lear’ is, in some of its highest attributes, by an investigation of the process by which one of the feeblest and most prosaic of verse-makers has turned it into something essentially different. Tate thus becomes a standard by which to measure Shakspeare; and we are relieved from the oppressive sense of the vast, by the juxtaposition of the minute. We judge of the height of the pyramids by the scale of the human atoms at their base.

Shelley, in his eloquent ‘Defence of Poetry,’ published in his ‘Posthumous

Essays,' &c., has stated the grounds for his belief that the 'Lear' of Shakspeare may sustain a comparison with the master-pieces of the Greek tragedy. "The modern practice of blending comedy with tragedy, though liable to great abuse in point of practice, is undoubtedly an extension of the dramatic circle; but the comedy should be as in 'King Lear,' universal, ideal, and sublime. It is, perhaps, the intervention of this principle which determines the balance in favour of 'King Lear' against the 'Ædipus Tyrannus,' or the 'Agamemnon,' or, if you will, the trilogies with which they are connected; unless the intense power of the choral poetry, especially that of the latter, should be considered as restoring the equilibrium. 'King Lear,' if it can sustain that comparison, may be judged to be the most perfect specimen of the dramatic art existing in the world." We can understand this now. But, if any writer before the commencement of the present century, and indeed long after, had talked of the comedy of 'Lear' as being "universal, ideal, and sublime," and had chosen *that* as the excellence to balance against "the intense power of the choral poetry" of Æschylus and Sophocles, he would have been referred to the authority of Voltaire, who, in his letter to the Academy, describes such works of Shakspeare as forming "an obscure chaos, composed of murders and buffooneries, of heroism and meanness, of the language of the Halles, and of the highest interests." In certain schools of criticism, even yet, the notion that 'Lear' "may be judged to be the most perfect specimen of the dramatic *art* existing in the world," would be treated as a mere visionary conceit; and we should still be reminded that Shakspeare was a "wild and irregular genius," producing these results because he could not help it. In France are still heard the feeble echoes of the contest between the disciples of the romantic and the classic schools. M. Guizot stated, some twenty-five years ago, with his usual acuteness and good sense, some of the mistakes into which the opponents of the romantic school had fallen, from not perceiving that the productions of that school contained

within themselves a principle of art. "This intellectual ferment can never cease, as long as the question shall be mooted as a contest between science and barbarism—the beauties of order, and the irregular influences of disorder; as long as we shall obstinately refuse to see, in the system of which Shakspeare has traced the first outlines, nothing more than a liberty without restraint—an indefinite latitude, which lies open as much to the freaks of the imagination as to the course of genius. If the romantic system has its beauties, it has necessarily its art and its rules. Nothing is beautiful for man that does not owe its effect to certain combinations, of which our judgment may always disclose to us the secret when our emotions have borne witness to their power. The employment of these combinations constitutes art. Shakspeare had his own art. To discover it in his works we must examine the means which he used, and the results to which he aspired."* These combinations, of which Guizot speaks, were as unknown to what has been called the Augustan age of English literature as the properties of electro-magnetism; and poor Nahum Tate did not unfitly represent his age when he said of 'Lear,' "It is a heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished, yet so dazzling in their disorder that I soon perceived I had seized a treasure." The principle of appropriation here is exquisite. But, after all, we fancy that Tate was something like the cock in the fable, who, having found the jewel, in his secret heart wished it had been a grain of barley. Be this as it may, he set to work in good earnest in the stringing and polishing process. Let us proceed to examine the character of his workmanship.

Coleridge has remarked emphatically, what every diligent student of Shakspeare must have been impressed with, the striking judgment which he displays in the management of his first scenes. The first scene of 'Lear' is very short, perfectly simple, has no elaborate descriptions of character, and contains only a slight and incidental notice of the events upon which the drama is to turn. Of course Tate rejected this scene; and,

* 'Vie de Shakspeare.'

without the necessary preparation of the dialogue between Kent and Gloster, he brings at once Edmund before us in the soliloquy, "Thou, nature, art my goddess." Shakspeare, in his soliloquies, makes his characters pursue a certain train of ideas to a conclusion; and, by causing them to think aloud, he is enabled, without the slightest violation of propriety, to give the audience a due impression of their latent motives. He very rarely employs this expedient, but he never employs it in vain, or goes beyond its legitimate use. We have an example in the soliloquy of Iago at the end of the first act of 'Othello;' and the soliloquy of Edmund in the second scene of 'Lear' has precisely the same object in view. Tate, not understanding the art of Shakspeare, and having no dramatic art in himself, makes the soliloquy an instrument for telling the audience what has happened; and instead of exhibiting the management by which Gloster is made to distrust and hate Edgar, he gives us a *narrative* of the affair, which Edmund tells to the audience under the pretence of talking to himself:—

"With success

I've practised yet on both their easy natures.
Here comes the old man, chafed with the in-
formation

Which last I forged against my brother Edgar;
A tale so plausible, so boldly utter'd,
And heighten'd by such lucky accidents,
That now the slightest circumstance confirms
him,

And base-born Edmund, spite of law, in-
herits."

It is no part of the plan of this notice to point out the differences between the language of Tate and the language of Shakspeare. It is with the conduct of the drama only that we wish to deal. Gloster, of course, after this preparation, enters in a furious passion.

The main business of the tragedy, by Tate's arrangement, has been thus made subordinate to the secondary plot. But Lear is not quite forgotten: Gloster says to Kent,—

"My lord, you wait the king, who comes re-
solved

To quit the toils of empire, and divide
His realms amongst his daughters. Heav'n
succeed it,
But much I fear the change."

To which Kent replies,—

"I grieve to see him
With such wild starts of passion hourly seized
As render majesty beneath itself."

We may be sure that, if a dramatic purpose would have been served by a *description* of the temper of Lear, instead of an exhibition of it, Shakspeare would have introduced such a description. But that was not *his* art; it was for the jewel-stringer to convey impressions by such clumsy and commonplace means. We have one more new combination to notice in Tate's introductory scene—Edgar and Cordelia in love. Of the results of this combination we shall have presently to speak. In the mean time, let the lovers explain themselves through the nine lines in the preparation of which Tate has put out his poetical strength:—

"Edg. Cordelia, royal fair, turn yet once
more,

And ere successful Burgundy receive
The treasure of thy beauties from the king,
Ere happy Burgundy for ever fold thee,
Cast back one pitying look on wretched
Edgar.

"Cord. Alas! what would the wretched
Edgar with

The more unfortunate Cordelia,
Who, in obedience to a father's will,
Flies from her Edgar's arms to Burgundy's?"

The second scene of Tate, like the second scene of Shakspeare, exhibits the trial by Lear of his daughters' affections, and the subsequent division of the kingdom. It was perfectly clear that, in changing the dramatic situation of Cordelia, Tate would destroy her character. But it is not within the range of human ingenuity to conjecture how effectually he has contrived to render one of the loveliest of Shakspeare's creations not only uninteresting, but positively repulsive—he has produced a selfish and dissimulating Cordelia. These are the first words which she utters:—

"Now comes my trial. How am I distress'd
That must with cold speech tempt the cholerick
king
Rather to leave me dowerless, than condemn
me
To Burgundy's embraces!"

"Of the heavenly beauty of soul of Cordelia, pronounced in so few words, I will not venture to speak." This was the impression which Shakspeare's Cordelia produced upon Schlegel. In the whole range of the Shakspearean drama there is nothing more extraordinary than the effect upon the mind of the character of Cordelia. Mrs. Jameson has truly said, "Everything in her seems to lie beyond our view, and affects us in a manner which we feel rather than perceive." In the first act she has only forty-three lines assigned to her: she does not appear again till the fourth act, in the fourth scene of which she has twenty-four lines, and, in the seventh, thirty-seven. In the fifth act she has five lines. Yet during the whole progress of the play we can never forget her; and, after its melancholy close, she lingers about our recollections as if we had seen some being more beautiful and purer than a thing of earth, who had communicated with us by a higher medium than that of words. And yet she is no mere abstraction;—she is nothing more nor less than a personification of the holiness of womanhood. She is a creature formed for all sympathies, moved by all tenderness, prompt for all duty, prepared for all suffering; but she cannot talk of what she is, and what she purposes. The King of France describes the apparent reserve of her character as

"A tardiness in nature,
Which often leaves the history unspoke
That it intends to do."

She herself says,—

"If for I want that glib and oily art,
To speak, and purpose not; since what I well
intend,
I'll do 't before I speak."

But the conception of a character that should fill our minds without much talk, and withal magniloquent talk, was something too ethereal for Tate: so Cordelia is turned

into a French intrigante. She does not profess as her sisters professed, not because she wanted the "glib and oily art," but because she desired to accomplish a secret purpose, that was to be carried by silence better than by words—she would lose her dower that she might marry Edgar. One more specimen of the Tatification of Cordelia, and we have done. The love-scenes, be it understood, go forward; and in the third act Cordelia, herself wandering about, encounters Edgar in his mad disguise. "The tardiness in nature" of Shakspeare is thus interpreted in the production which "Garriick and his followers, the showmen of the scene," have inflicted upon us almost up to the present day, under the sanction of Dr. Johnson:—

"*Cord.* Come to my arms, thou dearest,
best of men,
And take the kindest vows that e'er were
spoke

By a protesting maid.

"*Edg.* Is 't possible?"

"*Cord.* By the dear vital stream that
bathes my heart,
These hallow'd rags of thine, and naked
virtue,
These abject tassels, these fantastic shreds,
To me are dearer than the richest pomp
Of purpled monarchs."

Need we exhibit more of the Cordelia which is not Shakspeare's?

The mixed character of Shakspeare's 'Lear' has been admirably dissected by Coleridge:—

"The strange, yet by no means unnatural mixture of selfishness, sensibility, and habit of feeling, derived from, and fostered by, the particular rank and usages of the individual; the intense desire of being intensely beloved,—selfish, and yet characteristic of the selfishness of a loving and kindly nature alone;—the self-supportless leaning for all pleasure on another's breast;—the craving after sympathy with a prodigal disinterestedness, frustrated by its own ostentation, and the mode and nature of its claims;—the anxiety, the distrust, the jealousy, which more or less accompany all selfish affections, and are amongst the surest contradistinctions of mere fondness from true love, and which originate

Lear's eager wish to enjoy his daughter's violent professions, whilst the inveterate habits of sovereignty convert the wish into claim and positive right, and an incomppliance with it into crime and treason;—these facts, these passions, these moral verities, on which the whole tragedy is founded, are all prepared for, and will to the retrospect be found implied, in the first four or five lines of the play." They are implied, certainly, but the character which they make up is not described by Shakspeare. When Regan and Goneril speak slightly of their father, immediately after he has been lavishing his kingdom upon them, it is not the object of the poet to make us understand Lear, but to make us understand Regan and Goneril. This, again, was Shakspeare's art:—Tate, the representative of the vulgar notion of art, must have a defined character—something positive, something generic—a bad man, a good man—a mild man, a passionate man—a good son, a cruel son. Upon this principle the Lear of Tate is *the choleric king*. Because Goneril characteristically speaks of "the unruly waywardness that infirm and choleric years bring with them," Gloster, in Tate, is made to say of Lear,—

"Yet has his temper ever been unfix'd,
Chol'ric and sudden;"

and, as if this were not enough to disturb an audience in the proper comprehension of the real Lear, we must have Cordelia call him "the choleric king," and, last of all, Lear himself must exclaim, in the trial-scene, "'t is said that I am choleric." And now, then, that we have got a choleric king—a simple, unmixed, ranting, roaring, choleric king, he is in a fit condition to be stirred up by "the showmen of the scene." Charles Lamb would be immortal as a critic if he had only written these words:—"Tate has put his hook in the nostrils of this leviathan, for Garrick and his followers, the showmen of the scene, to draw the mighty beast about more easily." All the wonderful gradations of his character are utterly destroyed;—all the thin partitions which separate passion from wildness, and wildness from insanity, and insanity from a partial restoration to the most intense of

human feelings,—a father's concentrated love;—all these traces of what Shakspeare only could effect, are utterly destroyed by the stage conception of Lear, such as has been endured amongst us for more than a century. When the "showmen" banished the Fool, they rendered it impossible that the original nature of Lear should be understood. It is the Fool who interprets to us the old man's sensitive tenderness lying at the bottom of his impatience. He cannot bear to hear that "the Fool hath much pined away."—"No more of that, I have noted it well." From the Fool, Lear can bear to hear truth; his jealous pride is not alarmed: he indeed calls him "a pestilent gall," "a bitter fool;" but the

"Poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man,"
in the depths of his misery, having scarcely anything in the world to love but the Fool, thus clings to him:—

"My wits begin to turn—
Come on, my boy: How dost, my boy? Art cold?
I am cold myself.—Where is this straw, my fellow?
The art of our necessities is strange,
That can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel:
Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
That 's sorry yet for thee."

And all this is gone in the stage Lear. The "universal, ideal, and sublime" comedy, of which the Fool is the principal exponent, would have been incomprehensible to the Augustan age. We are quite sure that Tate would have got rid of the assumed madness of Edgar, if he had not found it convenient for the purpose of tacking a love-scene to it. As it is, he has brought the mad Tom and the mad king into juxtaposition. We do not suspect Tate of comprehending the metaphysical principle upon which Shakspeare worked, and which Coleridge has so well expounded:—"Edgar's assumed madness serves the great purpose of taking off part of the shock which would otherwise be caused by the true madness of Lear, and further displays the profound difference between the

two. In every attempt at representing madness throughout the whole range of dramatic literature, with the single exception of Lear, it is mere light-headedness, as especially in Otway. In Edgar's ravings, Shakspeare all the while lets you see a fixed purpose, a practical end in view; in Lear's there is only the brooding of the one anguish, an eddy without progression." Tate has left us this contrast; but he has taken away the Fool, which completes the wonderful power of the third act of Shakspeare's 'Lear.' The Fool, as well as Edgar, takes off part of the shock which would otherwise be caused by the madness of Lear, whilst he yet contributes to the completeness of that moral chaos which Shakspeare has represented—"all external nature in a storm, all moral nature convulsed." A writer of very rare depth and discrimination has thus described these scenes of which Edgar and the Fool make up such important accessories:—"The two characters, father and king, so high to our imagination and love, blended in the reverend image of Lear—*both* in their destitution, yet *both* in their height of greatness—the spirit blighted, and yet undepressed—the wits gone, and yet the moral wisdom of a good heart left unstained, almost unobscured—the wild raging of the elements, joined with human outrage and violence to persecute the helpless, unresisting, almost unoffending sufferer—and he himself, in the midst of all imaginable misery and desolation, descanting upon himself, on the whirlwinds that drive around him, and then turning in tenderness to some of the wild motley associations of sufferers among whom he stands—all this is not like what has been seen on any stage, perhaps in any reality; but it has made a world to our imagination about one single imaginary individual, such as draws the reverence and sympathy which would seem to belong properly only to living men. It is like the remembrance of some wild perturbed scene of real life. Everything is perfectly woful in this world of woe. The very assumed madness of Edgar, which, if the story of Edgar stood alone, would be insufferable, and would utterly degrade him to us, seems, associated as he is with Lear, to come within the

consecration of Lear's madness. It agrees with all that is brought together;—the night—the storms—the houselessness—Gloster with his eyes put out—the Fool—the semblance of a madman, and Lear in his madness,—are all bound together by a strange kind of sympathy, confusion in the elements of nature, of human society and the human soul! Throughout all the play is there not sublimity felt amidst the continual presence of all kinds of disorder and confusion in the natural and moral world;—a continual consciousness of eternal order, law, and good? This it is that so exalts it in our eyes."*

The love-scene between Edgar and Cordelia, in the first scene of the first act of Tate's 'Lear,' was an assurance, under the hand and seal of Tate, that the play would end happily. He might be constrained, in the impossibility of wholly destroying Shakspeare, to exhibit to us some of the most terrific conflicts of human passion, and the most striking displays of human suffering. He could not utterly conceal the terrible workings of the mind of Lear, which had been laid bare by the "explosions of his passion." But he takes care to let it be understood that there is nothing real in this; that all will be right in the end; that, though the flames rage, the house is insured; that a wedding and a dance will terminate the play much better than the "dead march" of Shakspeare. "Cordelia," says Dr. Johnson, "from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And, if my sensations could add anything to the general suffrage, I might relate, I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor."

This was a bold or a lazy avowal in Johnson; for Aristotle describes the popular admiration of the tragedy which ends happily for the good characters, and fatally for the bad, as a result of the "weakness of the spectators;"† and though Johnson vigorously attacked Aristotle's Unities—or rather the

* 'Blackwood's Mag.,' vol. v.

† 'Treatise on Poetry'—Twining's Translation.

doctrine of the Unities imputed to Aristotle—the good critic must have been sleeping when he gave his voice to the general suffrage at the risk of being accounted weak. Johnson was too clever a man not to know that he lost something by not reading “the last scenes” of Shakspeare’s ‘Lear;’ and we have considerable doubts whether he ever looked into the last scenes of Tate’s ‘Lear.’ Carrying the principle to the end with which we set out, we venture to print the last scene of each writer; and we ask our readers to apply the scale of Tate, in the manner which we have indicated, to the admeasurement of Shakspeare:—

[TATE.]

“*Enter ALBANY, KENT, and Knights to
LEAR and CORDELIA in Prison.*”

Lear. Who are you?

My eyes are none o’ th’ best, I’ll tell you straight:

Oh, Albany! Well, sir, we are your captives,
And you are come to see death pass upon us.
Why this delay?—Or, is’t your highness’ pleasure

To give us first the torture? Say you so?
Why here’s old Kent, and I, as tough a pair
As e’re bore tyrant stroke;—but my Cordelia,
My poor Cordelia here, O pity——

Alb. Thou injured majesty,
The wheel of fortune now has made her circle,
And blessings yet stand ’twixt thy grave and thee.

Lear. Com’st thou, inhuman lord, to sooth us back
To a fool’s paradise of hope, to make
Our doom more wretched? Go to; we are too well
Acquainted with misfortune, to be gull’d
With lying hope; no, we will hope no more.

* * * *

Alb. Since then my injuries, Lear, fall in with thine,
I have resolved the same redress for both.

Kent. What says my lord?

Cord. Speak; for methought I heard
The charming voice of a descending god.

Alb. The troops by Edmund raised, I have disbanded:
Those that remain are under my command.

What comfort may be brought to cheer your age,
And heal your savage wrongs, shall be apply’d;

For to your majesty we do resign
Your kingdom, save what part yourself conferr’d

On us in marriage.

Kent. Hear you that, my liege?

Cord. Then there are gods, and virtue is their care.

Lear. Is’t possible?

Let the spheres stop their course, the sun make halt,

The winds be hush’d, the seas and fountains rest,

All nature pause, and listen to the change!

Where is my Kent, my Caius?

Kent. Here, my liege.

Lear. Why, I have news that will recall thy youth;

Ha! didst thou hear’t?—or did th’ inspiring gods

Whisper to me alone?—Old Lear shall be A king again.

Kent. The prince, that like a god has pow’r, has said it.

Lear. Cordelia then shall be a queen, mark that;

Cordelia shall be queen: winds, catch the sound,

And bear it on your rosy wings to heaven,
Cordelia is a queen.

Alb. Look, sir, where pious Edgar comes,
Leading his eyeless father. O, my liege,
His wond’rous story well deserves your leisure;
What he has done and suffer’d for your sake,
What for the fair Cordelia’s.

Re-enter EDGAR with GLOSTER.

Glost. Where’s my liege? Conduct me to his knees, to hail

His second birth of empire: My dear Edgar
Has, with himself, reveal’d the king’s blest restoration.

Lear. My poor dark Gloster!

Glost. Oh, let me kiss that once more scepter’d hand?

Lear. Hold, thou mistak’st the majesty; kneel here;

Cordelia has our pow’r, Cordelia’s queen.

Speak, is not that the noble, suff’ring Edgar?

Glost. My pious son, more dear than my lost eyes.

Lear. I wrong'd him too; but here's the fair amends.

* * * *

Edg. Divine Cordelia, all the gods can witness

How much thy love to empire I prefer.
Thy bright example shall convince the world,
Whatever storms of fortune are decreed,
That truth and virtue shall at last succeed.

(*Flourish of Drums and Trumpets.*)

[SHAKSPERE.]

"*Enter LEAR, with CORDELIA dead in his arms; EDGAR, Officer, and others.*

Lear. Howl, howl, howl! O, you are men of stones;

Had I your tongues and eyes I'd use them so
That heaven's vault should crack:—She's gone for ever!—

I know when one is dead, and when one lives;

She's dead as earth:—Lend me a looking-glass;

If that her breath will mist or stain the stone,
Why, then she lives.

Kent. Is this the promised end?

Edg. Or image of that horror?

Alb. Fall, and cease!

Lear. This feather stirs; she lives! if it be so,

It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt.

Kent. O my good master!
[*Kneeling.*

Lear. Prythee, away.

Edg. 'T is noble Kent, your friend.

Lear. A plague upon you, murderers, traitors all!

I might have saved her; now she's gone for ever—

Cordelia, Cordelia, stay a little. Ha!

What is't thou say'st?—Her voice was ever soft,
Gentle, and low; an excellent thing in woman:—

I kill'd the slave that was a hanging thee.

Off. 'T is true, my lords, he did.

Lear. Did I not, fellow?

I have seen the day, with my good biting faulchion

I would have made them skip: I am old now,
And these same crosses spoil me.—Who are you?

Mine eyes are not o' the best:—I'll tell you straight.

Kent. If fortune brag of two she loved and hated,

One of them we behold.

Lear. This is a dull sight. Are you not Kent?

Kent. The same;

Your servant Kent: Where is your servant Caius?

Lear. He's a good fellow, I can tell you that;

He'll strike, and quickly too: He's dead and rotten.

Kent. No, my good lord; I am the very man;—

Lear. I'll see that straight.

Kent. That, from your first of difference and decay,

Have follow'd your sad steps.

Lear. You are welcome hither.

Kent. Nor no man else; all's cheerless, dark, and deadly.—

Your eldest daughters have fore-done themselves,

And desperately are dead.

Lear. Ay, so I think.

Alb. He knows not what he says; and vain it is

That we present us to him.

Edg. Very bootless.

Enter an Officer.

Off. Edmund is dead, my lord.

Alb. That's but a trifle here.—

You lords, and noble friends, know our intent.

What comfort to this great decay may come

Shall be applied: For us, we will resign,

During the life of this old majesty,

To him our absolute power:—You, to your rights:

[*To EDGAR and KENT.*

With boot, and such addition as your honours
Have more than merited.—All friends shall taste

The wages of their virtue, and all foes

The cup of their deservings.—Oh, see, see!

Lear. And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life:

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,

And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more.

Never, never, never, never, never!—

Pray you undo this button: Thank you, sir.—

Do you see this? Look on her,—look,—her lips,—

Look there, look there!— [He dies.

Edg. He faints!—My lord, my lord,—

Kent. Break, heart; I pr'ythee, break!

Edg. Look up, my lord.

Kent. Vex not his ghost: Oh, let him pass!
he hates him

That would upon the rack of this tough
world

Stretch him out longer.

* * * *

[*Exeunt with a dead march.*"]

And why do we ask any one of our readers to compare what cannot be compared?—why do we put one of the most divine conceptions of poetry side by side with the meanest interpretation of the most unimaginative feelings—equally remote from the verisimilitude of common life, as from the truth of ideal beauty? It is, as we have said before, because we feel unable to impart to others our own conceptions of the marvellous power of the 'Lear' of Shakspeare, without employing some agency that may give distinctness to ideas which must be otherwise vague. There is only one mode in which such a production as the 'Lear' of Shakspeare can be understood—by study, and by reverential reflection. The age which produced the miserable parody of 'Lear' that till within a few years has banished the 'Lear'

of Shakspeare from the stage, was, as far as regards the knowledge of the highest efforts of intellect, a presumptuous, artificial, and therefore empty age. Tate was tolerated because Shakspeare was not read. We have arrived, in some degree, to a better judgment, because we have learnt to judge more humbly. We have learnt to compare the highest works of the highest masters of poetry, not by the pedantic principle of considering a modern great only to the extent in which he is an imitator of an ancient, but by endeavouring to comprehend the idea in which the modern and the ancient each worked. The Cordelia of Shakspeare and the Antigone of Sophocles have many points of similarity; but they each belong to a different system of art. It is for the highest minds only to carry their several systems to an approach to the perfection to which Shakspeare and Sophocles have carried them. It was for the feeblest of imitators, in a feeble age, to produce such parodies as we have exhibited, under the pretence of substituting order for irregularity, but in utter ignorance of the principle of order which was too skilfully framed to be visible to the grossness of their taste.

CHAPTER VII.

MACBETH.

'THE Tragedie of Macbeth' was first published in the folio collection of 1623. Its place in that edition is between 'Julius Cæsar' and 'Hamlet.' In the entry on the Stationers' register, immediately previous to the publication of the edition of 1623, it is also classed amongst the Tragedies. And yet, in modern reprints of the text of Shakspeare, 'Macbeth' is placed the first amongst the Histories. This is to convey a wrong notion of the character of this great drama. Shakspeare's Chronicle-histories are essentially conducted upon a different principle. The interest of 'Macbeth' is not an historical interest. It matters not whether the action

is true, or has been related as true: it belongs to the realms of poetry altogether. We might as well call 'Lear' or 'Hamlet' historical plays, because the outlines of the story of each are to be found in old records of the past.

Malone and Chalmers agree in assigning this tragedy to the year 1606. Their proofs, as we apprehend, are entirely frivolous and unsatisfactory. The Porter says, "Here's a farmer, that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty:" the year 1606 was a year of plenty, and therefore 'Macbeth' was written in 1606. Again, the same character says, "Here's an equivocator, that could swear

in both the scales, against either scale." This passage Malone most solemnly tells us, "without doubt, had a direct reference to the doctrine of equivocation avowed and maintained by Henry Garnet, superior of the order of the Jesuits in England, on his trial for the Gunpowder Treason, on the 28th of March, 1606, and to his detestable perjury." There is more of this sort of reasoning, in the examination of which it appears to us quite unnecessary to occupy the time of our readers. We have two facts as to the chronology of this play which are indisputable:—the first is, that it must have been written after the crowns of England and Scotland were united in one monarch, who was a descendant of Banquo:—

"Some I see

That two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry."

The second is, that Dr. Forman has most minutely described the representation of this tragedy in the year 1610. The following extract from his 'Book of Plays, and Notes thereof, for common Policy,' is copied by Mr. Collier from the manuscript in the Bodleian Library:—

"In 'Macbeth,' at the Globe, 1610, the 20th of April, Saturday, there was to be observed, first, how Macbeth and Banquo, two noblemen of Scotland, riding through a wood, there stood before them three women, fairies, or nymphs, and saluted Macbeth, saying three times unto him, Hail, Macbeth, King of Coudor, for thou shalt be a king, but shalt beget no kings, &c. Then said Banquo, What, all to Macbeth and none to me? Yes, said the nymphs, Hail to thee, Banquo? thou shalt beget kings, yet be no king. And so they departed, and came to the court of Scotland, to Duncan, King of Scots, and it was in the days of Edward the Confessor. And Duncan bade them both kindly welcome, and made Macbeth forthwith Prince of Northumberland; and sent him home to his own castle, and appointed Macbeth to provide for him, for he would sup with him the next day at night, and did so.

"And Macbeth contrived to kill Duncan, and through the persuasion of his wife did that night murder the king in his own castle, being his guest. And there were many prodigies seen that night and the day before. And when Macbeth had murdered the king, the blood

on his hands could not be washed off by any means, nor from his wife's hands, which handled the bloody daggers in hiding them, by which means they became both much amazed and affronted.

"The murder being known, Duncan's two sons fled, the one to England, the other to Wales, to save themselves: they being fled, were supposed guilty of the murder of their father, which was nothing so.

"Then was Macbeth crowned king, and then he, for fear of Banquo, his old companion, that he should beget kings but be no king himself, he contrived the death of Banquo, and caused him to be murdered on the way that he rode. The night, being at supper with his noblemen, whom he had bid to a feast (to the which also Banquo should have come), he began to speak of noble Banquo, and to wish that he were there. And as he thus did, standing up to drink a carouse to him, the ghost of Banquo came and sat down in his chair behind him. And he, turning about to sit down again, saw the ghost of Banquo, which fronted him, so that he fell in a great passion of fear and fury, uttered many words about his murder, by which, when they heard that Banquo was murdered, they suspected Macbeth.

"Then Macduff fled to England to the king's son, and so they raised an army and came into Scotland, and at Dunston Anyse overthrew Macbeth. In the mean time, while Macduff was in England, Macbeth slew Macduff's wife and children, and after, in the battle, Macduff slew Macbeth.

"Observe, also, how Macbeth's queen did rise in the night in her sleep and walk, and talked and confessed all, and the doctor noted her words."

Here, then, the date of this tragedy must be fixed after the accession of James I. in 1603, and before the representation at which Forman was present in 1610. Mr. Collier is inclined to believe that the play was a new one when Forman saw it acted. Be that as it may, we can have no doubt that it belonged to the last ten years of the poet's life.

That Shakspeare found sufficient materials for this great drama in Holinshed's 'History of Scotland' is a fact that renders it quite unnecessary for us to enter into any discussion as to the truth of this portion of

the history, or to point out the authorities upon which the narrative of Holinshed was founded. Better authorities than Holinshed had access to have shown that the contest for the crown of Scotland between Duncan and Macbeth was a contest of factions, and that Macbeth was raised to the throne by his Norwegian allies after a battle in which Duncan fell: in the same way, after a long rule, was he vanquished and killed by the son of Duncan, supported by his English allies*. But with the differences between the real and apocryphal history it is manifest that we can here have no concern. There is another story told also in the same narrative, which Shakspeare with consummate skill has blended with the story of Macbeth. It is that of the Murder of King Duff by Donwald and his wife in Donwald's castle of Forres —

“The king got him into his privy chamber, only with two of his chamberlains, who, having brought him to bed, came forth again, and then fell to banqueting with Donwald and his wife, who had prepared divers delicate dishes and sundry sorts of drinks for their rear-supper or collation, whereat they sat up so long, till they had charged their stomachs with such full gorges, that their heads were no sooner got to the pillow but asleep they were so fast that a man might have removed the chamber over them sooner than to have awaked them out of their drunken sleep.

“Then Donwald, though he abhorred the act greatly in heart, yet through instigation of his wife he called four of his servants unto him (whom he had made privy to his wicked intent before, and framed to his purpose with large gifts), and now declaring unto them after what sort they should work the feat, they gladly obeyed his instructions, and, speedily going about the murder, they enter the chamber (in which the king lay) a little before cock's crow, where they secretly cut his throat as he lay sleeping, without any bustling at all; and immediately by a postern gate they carried forth the dead body into the fields. * * * * * Donwald, about the time that the murder was in doing, got him amongst them that kept the watch, and so continued in company with them all the residue of the night. But in the morning, when the noise was raised in the

king's chamber how the king was slain, his body conveyed away, and the bed all beraid with blood, he with the watch ran thither, as though he had known nothing of the matter, and breaking into the chamber, and finding cakes of blood in the bed and on the floor about the sides of it, he forthwith slew the chamberlains as guilty of that heinous murder. * * * * * For the space of six months together, after this heinous murder thus committed, there appeared no sun by day, nor moon by night, in any part of the realm, but still was the sky covered with continual clouds, and sometimes such outrageous winds arose, with lightnings and tempests, that the people were in great fear of present destruction.”

It was originally the opinion of Steevens and Malone that a play by Thomas Middleton, entitled ‘The Witch,’ had preceded ‘Macbeth,’ and that Shakspeare was consequently indebted to Middleton for the general idea of the witch incantations. Malone subsequently changed his opinion; for in a posthumous edition of his ‘Essay on the Chronological Order,’ he has maintained that ‘The Witch’ was a later production than ‘Macbeth.’

There is an interesting point connected with the origin of ‘Macbeth,’ namely, whether an actual visit to Scotland suggested some of the descriptions, and probably the very story of this tragedy. The question ‘Did Shakspeare visit Scotland?’ was first raised, in 1767, by William Guthrie, in his ‘General History of Scotland:’ “A.D. 1599. The King, to prove how thoroughly he was now emancipated from the tutelage of his clergy, desired Elizabeth to send him this year a company of English comedians. She complied, and James gave them a licence to act in his capital and in his court. I have great reason to think that the immortal Shakspeare was of the number.” Guthrie, a very loose and inaccurate compiler, gives no authority for his statement; but it is evidently founded upon the following passage in Archbishop Spottiswood's ‘History of the Church of Scotland,’ which the writer says was “penned at the command of King James the Sixth, who bid the author write the truth and spare not:”—

* See Skene's ‘Highlanders of Scotland,’ vol. i. p. 116.

"In the end of the year [1599] happened some new jars betwixt the King and the ministers of Edinburgh; because of a company of English comedians, whom the King had licensed to play within the burgh. The ministers, being offended with the liberty given them, did exclaim in their sermons against stage-players, their unruliness and immodest behaviour; and in their sessions made an act, prohibiting people to resort unto their plays, under pain of the church censures. The King, taking this to be a discharge of his licence, called the sessions before the council, and ordained them to annul their act, and not to restrain the people from going to these comedies: which they promised, and accordingly performed; whereof publication was made the day after, and all that pleased permitted to repair unto the same, to the great offence of the ministers." This account by Spottiswood is abundantly confirmed by some very curious entries in the accounts of the Lord High Treasurer and the Acts of the Privy Council, which are preserved in the Register House at Edinburgh. The Lord High Treasurer's accounts show that in October, November, and December, 1599, the large sum of 426*l.* was distributed among certain English comedians.

The fortieth volume of the registers of the Town Council of Aberdeen contains some remarkable entries which show that in October, 1607, a company of players, specially recommended by the King, were paid a gratuity from the Corporation of Aberdeen for their performances in that town, one of them subsequently receiving the freedom of the borough; that they are called "*the King's servants*, who played comedies and stage-plays." The circumstance that they are recommended by the King's special letter is not so important as the description of them as the King's servants. Thirteen days after the entry of the 9th of October, at which first period these servants of the King had played some of their comedies, Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty, is admitted a burgess of Guild of the borough of Aberdeen—the greatest honour which the Corporation

could bestow. He is admitted to this honour in company with a nobleman of France visiting Aberdeen for the gratification of his curiosity, and recommended by the King to be favourably entertained; as well as with three men of rank, and others, who were directed by his Majesty to accompany "the said Frenchman." All the party are described in the document as knights and gentlemen. We have to inquire, then, who was Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty? Assuredly the King had not in his service a company of Scotch players. In 1599 he had licensed a company of English comedians to play at Edinburgh. Fond as James was of theatrical exhibitions, he had not the means of gratifying his taste, except through the visits of English comedians. Scotland had no drama.

"Lawrence Fletcher, comedian to his Majesty," was undoubtedly an Englishman; and "The King's servants presently in this borough who play comedies and stage-plays" were as certainly English players. There are not many facts known by which we can trace the history of Lawrence Fletcher. He is not mentioned amongst "the names of the principal actors in all these plays," which list is given in the first folio edition of Shakspeare; but he undoubtedly belonged to Shakspeare's company. The patent of James I., dated at Westminster on the nineteenth of May, 1603, in favour of the players acting at the Globe, is headed "*Pro Laurentio Fletcher et Willielmo Shakespeare & aliis*;" and it licenses and authorises the performances of "*Laurence Fletcher, William Shakespeare, Richard Burbage, Augustine Phillipps, John Hemings, Henrie Condell, William Sly, Robert Armin, Richard Cowly, and the rest of their associates*." The connection in 1603 of Fletcher and Shakspeare cannot be more distinctly established than by this document.

The patent of James the First of England directed to Lawrence Fletcher, William Shakspeare, and others, eighteen months after the performances at Aberdeen, is directed to those persons as "*our servants*." It does not appoint them the King's servants, but recognises the appointment as already

existing. Can there be a reasonable doubt that the appointment was originally made by the King in Scotland, and subsisted when the same King ascended the English throne? Lawrence Fletcher was admitted a burghess of Guild of the borough of Aberdeen as comedian to his Majesty, in company with other persons who were servitors to his Majesty. He received that honour, we may conclude, as the head of the company, also the King's servants. We know not how he attained this distinction amongst his fellows, but it is impossible to imagine that accident so favoured him in two instances. The King's servant who was most favoured at Aberdeen, and the King's servant who is first in the patent in 1603, was surely placed in that position by the voice of his fellows, the other King's servants. William Shakspeare is named with him in a marked manner in the heading of the patent. Seven of their fellows are also named, as distinguished from "the rest of their associates." There can be no doubt of the identity of the Lawrence Fletcher, the servant of James VI. of Scotland, and the Lawrence Fletcher, the servant of James I. of England. Can we doubt that the King's servants who played comedies and stage-plays in Aberdeen, in 1601, were, taken as a company, the King's servants who were licensed to exercise the art and faculty of playing, throughout all the realm, in 1603? If these points are evident, what reason have we to doubt that William Shakspeare, the second named in the licence of 1603, was amongst the King's servants at Aberdeen in 1601? Every circumstance concurs in the likelihood that he was of that number recommended by the King's special letter; and his position in the licence, even before Burbage, was, we may well believe, a compliment to him who in 1601 had taught "our James" something of the power and riches of the English drama.

These circumstances give us, we think, warranty to conclude that the story of Macbeth might have been suggested to Shakspeare upon Scottish ground; that the accuracy displayed in the local descriptions and allusions might have been derived from a rapid personal observation; and that some

of the peculiarities of the witchcraft imagery might have been found in Scottish superstitions, more especially in those which are known to have been rife at Aberdeen at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In Coleridge's early sonnet 'to the Author of the Robbers,' his imagination is enchained to the most terrible scene of that play; disregarding, as it were, all the accessories by which its horrors are mitigated and rendered endurable:—

"Schiller! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
If through the shuddering midnight I had sent
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent
That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—
Lest in some after-moment aught more mean
Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
Black Horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout
Diminish'd shrunk from the more withering
scene!"

It was in a somewhat similar manner that Shakspeare's representation of the murder of Duncan affected the imagination of Mrs. Siddons:—"It was my custom to study my characters at night, when all the domestic cares and business of the day were over. On the night preceding that on which I was to appear in this part for the first time, I shut myself up, as usual, when all the family were retired, and commenced my study of Lady Macbeth. As the character is very short, I thought I should soon accomplish it. Being then only twenty years of age, I believed, as many others do believe, that little more was necessary than to get the words into my head; for the necessity of discrimination, and the development of character, at that time of my life, had scarcely entered into my imagination. But to proceed. I went on with tolerable composure, in the silence of the night, (a night I can never forget,) till I came to the assassination scene, when the horrors of the scene rose to a degree that made it impossible for me to get farther. I snatched up my candle, and hurried out of the room in a paroxysm of terror. My dress was of silk, and the rustling of it, as I ascended the stairs to go to bed, seemed to my panic-struck fancy like the movement of a spectre pursuing me. At last I reached

my chamber, where I found my husband fast asleep. I clapped my candlestick down upon the table, without the power of putting it out; and I threw myself on my bed, without daring to stay even to take off my clothes."*

This most interesting passage appears to us to involve the consideration of the principles upon which the examination of such a work of art as 'Macbeth' can alone be attempted. To analyse the conduct of the plot, to exhibit the obvious and the latent features of the characters, to point out the proprieties and the splendours of the poetical language,—these are duties which, however agreeable they may be to ourselves, are scarcely demanded by the nature of the subject; and they have been so often attempted, that there is manifest danger of being trite and wearisome if we should enter into this wide field. We shall, therefore, apply ourselves as strictly as possible to an inquiry into the nature of that poetical Art by which the horrors of this great tragedy are confined within the limits of pleasurable emotion.

If the drama of 'Macbeth' were to produce the same effect upon the mind of an imaginative reader as that described by Mrs. Siddons, it would not be the great work of art which it really is. If our poet had resolved, using the words of his own Othello, to

"abandon all remorse,

On horror's head horrors accumulate,"

the midnight terrors, such as Mrs. Siddons has described, would have indeed been a tribute to *power*,—but not to the power which has produced 'Macbeth.' The paroxysm of fear, the panic-struck fancy, the prostrated senses, so beautifully described by this impassioned actress, were the result of the intensity with which she had fixed her mind upon that part of the play which she was herself to act. In the endeavour to get the words into her head, her own fine genius was naturally kindled to behold a complete vision of the wonderful scene. Again, and again, were the words repeated, on that night which she could never forget,—in the silence of that night when all about her were sleeping. And then she heard the owl shriek, amidst

the hurried steps in the fatal chamber,—and she saw the bloody hands of the assassin,—and, personifying the murderess, she rushed to dip her own hands in the gore of Duncan. It is perfectly evident that this intensity of conception has carried the horrors far beyond the limits of pleasurable emotion, and has produced all the terrors of a real murder. No reader of the play, and no spectator, can regard this play as Mrs. Siddons regarded it. On that night she, probably for the first time, had a strong though imperfect vision of the character of Lady Macbeth, such as she afterwards delineated it; and in that case, what to all of us must, under any circumstances, be a work of art, however glorious, was to her almost a reality. It was the isolation of the scene, demanded by her own attempt to conceive the character of Lady Macbeth, which made it so terrible to Mrs. Siddons. We have to regard it as a part of a great whole, which combines and harmonises with all around it; for which we are adequately prepared by what has gone before; and which, even if we look at it as a picture which represents only that one portion of the action, has still its own repose, its own harmony of colouring, its own chiaroscuro,—is to be seen under a natural light. There was a preternatural light upon it when Mrs. Siddons saw it as she has described.

The assassination scene of the second act is dimly shadowed out in the first lines of the drama, when those mysterious beings,—

"So wither'd, and so wild in their attire;

That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on 't,"

have resolved to go

"Upon the heath:

There to meet with Macbeth."

We know there is to be evil. One of the critics of the last age has observed, "The Witches here seem to be introduced for no other purpose than to tell us they are to meet again." If the Witches had not been introduced in the first scene,—if we had not known that they were about "to meet with Macbeth,"—the narrative of Macbeth's prowess in the second scene, and the resolution of Duncan to create him Thane of

* Memoranda by Mrs. Siddons, inserted in her 'Life' by Mr. Campbell.

Cawdor, would have been comparatively pointless. The ten lines of the first Witch-scene give the key-note of the tragedy. They take us out of the course of ordinary life; they tell us there is to be a "supernatural soliciting;" they show us that we are entering into the empire of the unreal, and that the circle of the magician is to be drawn about us. When the Witches "meet again," their agency becomes more clear. There they are, again muttering of their uncouth spells, in language which sounds neither of earth nor heaven. Fortunate are those who have never seen the stage-witches of Macbeth, hag-like forms, with beards and brooms, singing D'Avenant's travestie of Shakspeare's lyrics, to music, fine and solemn indeed, but which is utterly inadequate to express the Shakspearean idea, as it does not follow the Shakspearean words. Fortunate are they; for, without the stage recollections, they may picture to themselves beings whose "character consists in the imaginative disconnected from the good; the shadowy obscure and fearfully anomalous of physical nature, the lawless of human nature,—elemental avengers without sex or kin."* The *stage-witches* of 'Macbeth' are not much elevated above the Witch of Edmonton of Rowley and Dekker—"the plain traditional old-woman witch of our ancestors; poor, deformed, and ignorant; the terror of villages, herself amenable to a justice." Charles Lamb (from whom we quote these words) has, with his accustomed discrimination, also shown the essential differences between the witches of Shakspeare and the witches of Middleton: "These (Middleton's) are creatures to whom man or woman plotting some dire mischief might resort for occasional consultation. Those originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first meet with Macbeth, he is spell-bound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination. These witches hurt the body; those have power over the soul."† But the witches of the stage 'Macbeth' are Middleton's witches,

and not Shakspeare's; and they sing Middleton's lyrics, as stolen by D'Avenant, but they are not Shakspeare's lyrics. The witches of Shakspeare essentially belong to the action. From the moment they exclaim

"A drum, a drum:
Macbeth doth come,"

all their powers are bent up to the accomplishment of his ruin. Shakspeare gives us no choruses of

"We dance to the echoes of our feet;"

and

"We fly by night 'mongst troops of spirits."

He makes the superstition tell upon the action of the tragedy, and not a jot farther; and thus he makes the superstition harmonize with the action, and prepare us for its fatal progress and consummation. It was an effect of his unequalled skill to render the superstition essentially poetical. When we hear in imagination the drum upon that wild heath, and see the victorious generals in the "proper temperament for generating or receiving superstitious impressions,"‡ we connect with these poetical situations the lofty bearing of the "imperfect speakers," and the loftier words of the "prophetic greeting:"

"All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Glamis!

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, thane of Cawdor!

All hail, Macbeth! that shalt be king hereafter."

It is the romance of this situation which throws its charm over the subsequent horrors of the realization of the prophecy, and keeps the whole drama within the limits which separate tragedy from the 'Newgate Calendar.' If some Tate had laid his hand upon 'Macbeth,' as upon 'Lear' (for D'Avenant, who did manufacture it into something which up to the time of Quin was played as Shakspeare's, had yet a smack of the poet in him)—if some matter-of-fact word-monger had thought it good service to "the rising generation" to get rid of the Witches, and had given the usurper and his wife only their ambition to stimulate their actions, he

* Coleridge's 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 238.

† 'Specimens of English Dramatic Poets,' vol. i. p. 187.

‡ Coleridge.

would have produced a George Barnwell instead of a Macbeth.

It is upon the different reception of the supernatural influence, proceeding out of the different constitution of their minds, by which we must appreciate the striking differences in the characters of Macbeth, Banquo, and Lady Macbeth. These are the three who are the sole recipients of the prophecy of the Witches; and this consideration, as it appears to us, must determine all that has been said upon the question whether Macbeth was or was not a brave man. There can be no doubt of his bravery when he was acting under the force of his own will. In the contest with "the merciless Macdonwald" he was "valour's minion." In that with "Norway himself" he was "Bellona's bridegroom." But when he encountered the Witches, and his will was laid prostrate under a belief in destiny, there was a new principle introduced into his mind. His self-possession and his self-reliance were gone:—

"Good sir, why do you start; and seem to *fear*
Things that do sound so fair?"

But he yet depended upon his reason. With marvellous art Shakspeare at this moment throws on the straw which is to break the camel's back:—

"The thane of Cawdor lives,
A prosperous gentleman; and, to be king,
Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor."

In a few minutes he knows he *is* Cawdor:—

"Glamis, and thane of Cawdor:
The greatest is behind."

But Banquo receives the partial consummation of the prophecy with an unsubdued mind:—

"Oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray us
In deepest consequence."

The will of Banquo refuses to be mixed up with the prophecy. The will of Macbeth becomes the accomplice of the "instruments of darkness," and is subdued to their purposes:—

"Why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?"

And then comes the refuge of every man of unfirm mind upon whom temptation is laid:—

"If chance will have me king, why, chance
may crown me,
Without my stir."

If he had opposed the chance, he would have been safe; but his will was prostrate before the chance, and he perished. It is perfectly clear that the faint battle had been fought between his principle and his "black and deep desires" when he saw something to "o'er-leap" even beyond the life of Duncan,—*"the prince of Cumberland."* In the conflict of his mind it is evident that he communicates to his wife the promises of those who "have more in them than mortal knowledge," not only that she might not lose the "dues of rejoicing," but that he might have some power to rely upon stronger than his own will. He was not deceived there. It is clear that Lady Macbeth had no reliance upon the prophecy working out itself. She had no belief that chance would make him king without his stir:—

"Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be
What thou art promised."

It was not thou *mayst* be, or thou *wilt* be, but thou *shalt* be. The only fear she had was of his nature. She would "catch the nearest way." She instantly saw that way. The prophecy was to her nothing but as it regarded the effect to be produced upon him who would not play false, and yet would wrongly win. All that is coming is clear before her, through the force of her will:—

"The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under *my* battlements."

Upon the arrival of Macbeth, the breathless rapidity with which she subjects him to her resolve is one of the most appalling things in the whole drama. Her tremendous will is the real destiny which subjugates his indecision. Not a word of question or expla-

nation! She salutes him as Glamis and Cawdor, and

"Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter."

This is the sole allusion to the weird sisters. "We will speak further," seals his fate.

Here then, up to this point, we have the supernatural influence determining the progress of the action with a precipitation which in itself appears almost supernatural; and yet it is in itself strictly consonant to nature. It works in and through human passions and feelings. It works through unbelief as well as through belief. It pervades the entire action, whether in its repose or in its tumult. When "the heavens' breath smells wooingly" in Macbeth's castle, we feel that it is as treacherous to the "gentle senses" of Duncan as the blandishments of his hostess; and that this calm is but the prelude to that "unruly" night which is to follow, with its "lamentings" and its "strange screams of death." But this is a part of the poetry of the action, which keeps the horror within the bounds prescribed by a high art. The beautiful adaptation of the characters to the action constitutes a higher essential of the poetry. The last scene of the first act, where Macbeth marshals before him the *secondary* consequences of the meditated crime, and the *secondary* arguments against its commission, —all the while forgetting that the real question is that of the one step from innocence into guilt,—and where all these prudential considerations are at once overwhelmed by a guilty energy which despises as well as renounces them,—that scene is indeed more terrible to us than the assassination scene; for it shows us how men fall through their own weakness and the bad strength of others. But in all this we see the deep philosophy of the poet,—his profound knowledge of the springs of human action, derived perhaps from his experience of every-day crime and folly, but lifted into the highest poetry by his marvellous imagination. We know that after this the scene of the murder must come. All the preparatory incidents are poetical. The moon is down; Banquo and Fleance walk by torch-

light; the servants are moving to rest; Macbeth is alone. He sees "the air-drawn dagger" which leads him to Duncan; he is still under the influence of some power stronger than his will; he is beset with false creations; his imagination is excited; he moves to bloodshed amidst a crowd of poetical images, with which his mind dallies, as it were, in its agony. Half frantic he has done the deed. His passion must now have vent. It rushes like a torrent over the calmness which his wife opposes to it. His terrors embody themselves in gushing descriptions of those fearful voices that rang in the murderer's ears. Reproaches and taunts have now no power over him:—

"I'll go no more:

I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on 't again, I dare not."

It is impossible, we apprehend, for the poet to have more clearly indicated the mode in which he meant to contrast the characters of Macbeth and his wife than in the scene before us. It is a mistake to characterise the intellect of Lady Macbeth as of a higher order than that of her husband. Her force of character was stronger, because her intellect was less. She wanted that higher power which he possessed—the power of imagination. She hears no noises in that terrible hour but the scream of the owl and the cry of the crickets. To her,

"The sleeping, and the dead,
Are but as pictures."

In her view

"A little water clears us of this deed."

We believe that, if it had not been for the necessities of a theatrical representation, Shakspeare would never have allowed it to have been supposed that a visible ghost was presented in the banquet-scene. It is to him who saw the dagger, and heard the voices cry "sleep no more," and who exclaimed

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand?"—

it is to him alone that the spectral appearances of that "solemn supper" are visible. Are they not then the forms only of his

imagination? The partner of his guilt, who looked upon the great crime only as a business of necessity,—who would have committed it herself but for one touch of feeling, confessed only to herself,—

“Had he not resembled

My father as he slept I had done 't,”—

who had before disclaimed even the tenderest feelings of a mother if they had stood between her and her purpose,—she sees no spectre, because her obdurate will cannot co-exist with the imagination which produces the terror and remorse of her husband. It is scarcely the “towering bravery of her mind,”* in the right sense of the word: it is something lower than courage; it is the absence of impressibility: the tenacious adherence to one dominant passion constitutes her force of character.

As Macbeth recedes from his original nature under the influence of his fears and his superstitions, he becomes, of necessity, a lower creature. It is the natural course of guilt. The “brave Macbeth” changes to a counterfeiter of passions, a hypocrite,—

“Oh, yet I do repent me of my fury,
That I did kill them.”

He descends not only to the hire of murderers, but to the slander of his friend to stimulate their revenge. But his temperament is still that of which poets are made. In his murderous purposes he is still imaginative:—

“Ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight; ere, to black Hecate's
summons,
The shard-borne beetle, with his drowsy hums,
Hath rung night's yawning peal,
There shall be done a deed of dreadful note.”

It is this condition of Macbeth's mind which, we must again repeat, limits and mitigates the horror of the tragedy. After the tumult of the banquet-scene the imagination of Macbeth again overbears (as it did after the murder) the force of the will in Lady Macbeth. It appears to us that her taunts and reproaches are only ventured upon by her when his excitement is beginning. After

* Mrs. Jameson.

it has run its terrific course, and the frightened guests have departed, and the guilty man mutters “it will have blood,” then is her intellectual energy utterly helpless before his higher passion. Mrs. Jameson says of this remarkable scene, “A few words of submissive reply to his questions, and an entreaty to seek repose, are all she permits herself to utter. There is a touch of pathos and tenderness in this silence which has always affected me beyond expression.” Is it submission? Is it tenderness? Is it not rather the lower energy in subjection to the higher? Her intellect has lost its anchorage; but his imagination is about to receive a new stimulant:—

“I will to-morrow
(And betimes I will) unto the weird sisters:
More shall they speak; for now I am bent to
know,
By the worst means, the worst.”

“He has by guilt torn himself live-asunder from nature, and is therefore himself in a preternatural state: no wonder, then, that he is inclined to superstition, and faith in the unknown of signs and tokens, and superhuman agencies.” Coleridge thus notices the point of action of which we are speaking. But it must not be forgotten that Macbeth was inclined to superstition before the guilt, and that his faith in superhuman agencies went far to produce the guilt. From this moment, however, his guilt is bolder, and his will more obdurate; his supernatural knowledge stands in the place of reflection and caution. He believes in it, and yet he will do something beyond the belief. He is told to “beware Macduff;” but he is also told that “none of woman born shall harm Macbeth.” How does he reconcile this contrary belief?—

“Then live, Macduff: What need I fear of thee?
But yet I'll make assurance double sure,
And take a bond of fate: thou shalt not live;
That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies,
And sleep in spite of thunder.”

And then comes the other prophecy of safety:—

“Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be, until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him.”

Does it produce tranquillity? All beyond is desperation:—

Macb. Saw you the weird sisters?

Len. No, my lord.

Macb. Came they not by you?

Len. No, indeed, my lord.

Macb. Infected be the air whereon they ride;

And damn'd all those that trust them!—I did hear

The galloping of horse: Who was't came by?

Len. 'T is two or three, my lord, that bring you word,

Macduff is fled to England.

Macb. Fled to England?

Len. Ay, my good lord.

Macb. Time, thou anticipat'st my dread exploits:

The flighty purpose never is o'ertook,

Unless the deed go with it: From this moment,

The very firstlings of my heart shall be

The firstlings of my hand. And even now,

To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done:

The castle of Macduff I will surprise;

Seize upon Fife; give to the edge o' the sword

His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls

That trace him in his line."

The retribution which falls upon Lady Macbeth is precisely that which is fitted to her guilt. The powerful will is subjected to the domination of her own imperfect senses. We cannot dwell upon her terrible punishment. There can be nothing beyond the agony of

"Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."

The vengeance falls more gently on Macbeth; for he is in activity; he is still confident in prophetic securities. The contemplative melancholy which, however, occasionally comes over him in the last struggle is still true to the poetry of his character:—

"Seyton!—I am sick at heart.

When I behold—Seyton, I say!—This push

Will cheer me ever, or dis-seat me now.

I have liv'd long enough: my way of life

Is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf:

And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses not loud, but deep, mouth-honour,
breath,

Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not."

This passage, and the subsequent one of

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty space from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death,"—

tell us of something higher and better in his character than the assassin and the usurper. He was the victim of "the equivocation of the fiend;" and he has paid a fearful penalty for his belief. The final avenging is a compassionate one, for he dies a warrior's death:—

"I will not yield,

To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,

And to be baited with the rabble's curse.

Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,

And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born,

Yet I will try the last: Before my body

I throw my warlike shield."

The principle which we have thus so imperfectly attempted to exhibit, as the leading characteristic of this glorious tragedy, is, without doubt, that which constitutes the essential difference between a work of the highest genius and a work of mediocrity. Without *power*—by which we here especially mean the ability to produce strong excitement by the display of scenes of horror—no poet of the highest order was ever made; but this alone does not make such a poet. If he is called upon to present such scenes, they must, even in their most striking forms, be associated with the beautiful. The pre-eminence of his art in this particular can alone prevent them affecting the imagination beyond the limits of pleasurable emotion. To keep within these limits, and yet to preserve all the energy which results from the power of dealing with the terrible apart from the beautiful, belongs to few that the world has seen: to Shakspeare it belongs surpassingly.

BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

A WINTER'S TALE.

WE have no edition of the 'Winter's Tale' prior to that of the folio of 1623; nor was it entered upon the registers of the Stationers' Company previous to the entry by the proprietors of the folio. The original text, which is divided into acts and scenes, is remarkably correct.

Chalmers has assigned the 'Winter's Tale' to 1601. The play contains this passage:—

"If I could find example
Of thousands that had struck anointed kings
And flourish'd after, I'd not do't: but since
Nor brass, nor stone, nor parchment, bears
not one,

Let villainy itself forswear 't."

"These lines," says Chalmers, "were called forth by the occasion of the conspiracy of Essex." "No," says Malone, "these lines could never have been intended for the ear of her who had deprived the Queen of Scots of her life. To the son of Mary they could not but have been agreeable." Upon this ground he assigned the comedy to 1604. There is a third critic, of much higher acuteness than the greater number of those who have given us speculations on the chronology of Shakspeare's plays,—we mean Horace Walpole, whose conjecture is so ingenious and amusing that we copy it without abridgment:—

"The 'Winter's Tale' may be ranked among the historic plays of Shakspeare, though not one of his numerous critics and commentators have discovered the drift of it. It was certainly intended (in compliment to Queen Elizabeth) as an indirect apology for her mother, Anne Boleyn. The address of the poet appears nowhere to more advantage. The subject was too delicate to be exhibited on the stage without a veil; and it was too recent, and touched the queen too nearly, for the bard to have ventured

so home an allusion on any other ground than compliment. The unreasonable jealousy of Leontes, and his violent conduct in consequence, form a true portrait of Henry VIII., who generally made the law the engine of his boisterous passions. Not only the general plan of the story is most applicable, but several passages are so marked that they touch the real history nearer than the fable. Hermione on her trial, says,

'For honour,
'T is a derivative from me to mine,
And only that I stand for.'

This seems to be taken from the very letter of Anne Boleyn to the king before her execution, where she pleads for the infant princess his daughter. Mamillius, the young prince, an unnecessary character, dies in his infancy; but it confirms the allusion, as Queen Anne, before Elizabeth, bore a still-born son. But the most striking passage, and which had nothing to do in the tragedy but as it pictured Elizabeth, is where Paulina, describing the new-born princess, and her likeness to her father, says, '*She has the very trick of his frown.*' There is one sentence, indeed, so applicable both to Elizabeth and her father, that I should suspect the poet inserted it after her death. Paulina, speaking of the child, tells the king—

'T is yours:
And might we lay the old proverb to your charge,
So like you, 't is the worse.'

The 'Winter's Tale' was therefore in reality a Second Part of 'Henry VIII.'

Plausible as this may appear, the conjecture falls to the ground when we consider that Shakspeare adopted all that part of the plot of this comedy which relates to the "unreasonable jealousy of Leontes" from a novel

of which we have an edition as early as 1588. Robert Greene, the auther of 'Pandosto,' could scarcely have intended his story as "a compliment to Queen Elizabeth" and a "true portrait of Henry VIII.," for he makes the jealous king of his novel terminate his career with suicide. In truth, as we have sometimes inferred, questions such as this are very pretty conundrums, and worthy to be cherished as the amusement of elderly gentlemen who have outlived their relish for early sports, and leave to others who are less careful of their dignity to

"Play at push-pin with the boys."

Beyond this they are for the most part worthless.

In the absence of any satisfactory internal evidence of the date of this comedy, beyond that furnished by the general character of the language and versification, it was at length pointed out by Malone that an entry in the office-book of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels in 1623, mentions "an old play called 'Winter's Tale,' formerly allowed of by Sir George Bucke and likewise by me." Sir George Bucke first exercised the office of Master of the Revels in 1610. The play, therefore, could not have been earlier than this year; and Mr. Collier has produced conclusive evidence that it was acted in 1611. We have again to refer to "a book of plays, and notes thereof, for common policy" kept by Dr. Symon Forman, and discovered some few years ago in the Bodleian Library. Forman saw the 'Winter's Tale' acted on the 15th of May, 1611, at Shakspeare's theatre, the Globe. It was most probably then a new play; for he is very minute in his description of the plot.

"Observe there how Leontes, King of Sicilia, was overcome with jealousy of his wife with the King of Bohemia, his friend, that came to see him; and how he contrived his death, and would have had his cupbearer to have poisoned him, who gave the King of Bohemia warning thereof, and fled with him to Bohemia.

"Remember, also, how he sent to the oracle of Apollo, and the answer of Apollo that she was guiltless, and that the king was jealous, &c., and how, except the child was found again that was

lost, the king should die without issue; for the child was carried into Bohemia, and there laid in a forest, and brought up by a shepherd. And the King of Bohemia's son married that wench, and how they fled into Sicilia to Leontes; and the shepherd having showed the letter to the nobleman whom Leontes sent, it was that child, and by the jewels found about her she was known to be Leontes' daughter, and was then sixteen years old.

"Remember, also, the rogue that came in all tattered, like Coll Pipin, and how he feigned him sick and to have been robbed of all he had, and how he cozened the poor man of all his money, and after came to the sheep-shear with a pedlar's pack, and there cozened them again of all their money. And how he changed apparel with the King of Bohemia's son, and then how he turned courtier, &c.

"Beware of trusting feigned beggars or fawning fellows."*

The novel of Robert Greene, called 'Pandosto,' and 'The History of Dorastus and Fawnia,' which Shakspeare undoubtedly followed, with very few important deviations, in the construction of the plot of his 'Winter's Tale,' is a small book, occupying fifty-nine pages in the reprint, with an Introductory Notice by Mr. Collier†. It was a work of extraordinary popularity, there being fourteen editions known to exist. Of the nature of Shakspeare's obligations to this work, Mr. Collier thus justly speaks:—

"Robert Greene was a man who possessed all the advantages of education: he was a graduate of both Universities—he was skilled in ancient learning and in modern languages—he had, besides, a prolific imagination, a lively and elegant fancy, and a grace of expression rarely exceeded; yet, let any person well acquainted with the 'Winter's Tale' read the novel of 'Pandosto,' upon which it was founded, and he will be struck at once with the vast pre-eminence of Shakespeare, and with the admirable manner in which he has converted materials supplied by another to his own use. The bare outline of the story (with the exception of Shakespeare's miraculous conclusion) is nearly the same in both; but this is all they have in common, and Shakespeare may be said to have scarcely

* 'New Particulars,' p. 20.

† 'Shakespeare's Library, Part I.

adopted a single hint for his descriptions, or a line for his dialogue; while in point of passion and sentiment Greene is cold, formal, and artificial—the very opposite of everything in Skakespeare.”

Without wearying the reader with any very extensive comparisons of the novel and the drama, we shall run through the production of Greene, to which our great poet has incidentally imparted a real interest.

“In the country of Bohemia,” says the novel, “there reigned a king called Pandosto.” The ‘Leontes’ of Shakspeare is the ‘Pandosto’ of Greene. The Polixenes of the play is Egistus in the novel:—

“It so happened that Egistus, King of Sicilia, who in his youth had been brought up with Pandosto, desirous to show that neither tract of time nor distance of place could diminish their former friendship, provided a navy of ships, and sailed into Bohemia to visit his old friend and companion.”

Here, then, we have the scene of the action reversed. The jealous king is of Bohemia,—his injured friend of Sicilia. But the visitor *sails* into Bohemia. The wife of Pandosto is Bellaria; and they have a young son called Garinter. Pandosto becomes jealous, slowly, and by degrees; and there is at least some want of caution in the queen to justify it:—

“Bellaria noting in Egistus a princely and bountiful mind, adorned with sundry and excellent qualities, and Egistus finding in her a virtuous and courteous disposition, there grew such a secret uniting of their affections, that the one could not well be without the company of the other.”

The great author of ‘Othello’ would not deal with jealousy after this fashion. He had already produced that immortal portrait

“Of one, not easily jealous, but, being wrought, Perplex’d in the extreme.”

He had now to exhibit the distractions of a mind to which jealousy was native; to depict the terrible access of passion, uprooting in a moment all deliberation, all reason, all

gentleness. The instant the idea enters the mind of Leontes the passion is at its height:—

“I have *tremor cordis* on me:—my heart dances.”

Very different is the jealous king of Greene:—

“These and such-like doubtful thoughts, a long time smothering in his stomach, began at last to kindle in his mind a secret mistrust, which, increased by suspicion, grew *at last* to a flaming jealousy that so tormented him as he could take no rest.”

Coleridge has described the jealousy of Leontes with incomparable truth of analysis:—

“The idea of this delightful drama is a genuine jealousy of disposition, and it should be immediately followed by the perusal of ‘Othello,’ which is the direct contrast of it in every particular. For jealousy is a vice of the mind, a culpable tendency of the temper, having certain well-known and well-defined effects and concomitants, all of which are visible in Leontes, and, I boldly say, not one of which marks its presence in Othello;—such as, first, an excitability by the most inadequate causes, and an eagerness to snatch at proofs; secondly, a grossness of conception, and a disposition to degrade the object of the passion by sensual fancies and images; thirdly, a sense of shame of his own feelings exhibited in a solitary moodiness of humour, and yet, from the violence of the passion, forced to utter itself, and therefore catching occasions to ease the mind by ambiguities, equivokes, by talking to those who cannot, and who are known not to be able to, understand what is said to them,—in short, by soliloquy in the form of dialogue, and hence a confused, broken, and fragmentary manner; fourthly, a dread of vulgar ridicule, as distinct from a high sense of honour, or a mistaken sense of duty; and lastly, and immediately consequent on this, a spirit of selfish vindictiveness.”*

The action of the novel and that of the drama continue in a pretty equal course. Pandosto tampers with his cupbearer, Franion, to poison Egistus; and the cupbearer, terrified at the fearful commission, reveals the design to the object of his master’s hatred. Eventually they escape together:—

“Egistus, fearing that delay might breed

* ‘Literary Remains,’ vol. ii.

danger, and willing that the grass should not be cut from under his feet, taking bag and baggage, by the help of Franion conveyed himself and his men out at a postern gate of the city, so secretly and speedily, that without any suspicion they got to the sea-shore; where, with many a bitter curse taking their leave of Bohemia, they went aboard."

Bellaria is committed to prison where she gives birth to a daughter. The guard

"carried the child to the king, who, quite devoid of pity, commanded that without delay it should be put in the boat, having neither sail nor rudder to guide it, and so to be carried into the midst of the sea, and there left to the wind and wave as the destinies please to appoint."

The queen appeals to the oracle of Apollo; and certain lords are sent to Delphos, where they receive this decree:—

"SUSPICION IS NO PROOF: JEALOUSY IS AN UNEQUAL JUDGE: BELLARIA IS CHASTE; EGISTUS BLAMELESS: FRANION A TRUE SUBJECT; PANDOSTO TREACHEROUS: HIS BABE INNOCENT; AND THE KING SHALL LIVE WITHOUT AN HEIR, IF THAT WHICH IS LOST BE NOT FOUND."

On their return, upon an appointed day, the queen was "brought in before the judgment-seat." Shakspeare has followed a part of the tragical ending of this scene; but he preserves his injured Hermione, to be reunited to her daughter after years of solitude and suffering.

"Bellaria had no sooner said but the king commanded that one of his dukes should read the contents of the scroll, which, after the commons had heard, they gave a great shout, rejoicing and clapping their hands that the queen was clear of that false accusation. But the king, whose conscience was a witness against him of his witless fury and false suspected jealousy, was so ashamed of his rash folly that he entreated his nobles to persuade Bellaria to forgive and forget these injuries; promising not only to show himself a loyal and loving husband, but also to reconcile himself to Egistus and Franion; revealing then before them all the cause of their secret flight, and how treacherously he thought to have practised his death, if the good mind of his cupbearer had not prevented his purpose. As thus he was relating the whole

matter, there was word brought him that his young son Garinter was suddenly dead, which news so soon as Bellaria heard, surcharged before with extreme joy and now suppressed with heavy sorrow, her vital spirits were so stopped that she fell down presently dead, and could never be revived."

Greene mentions only the existence and the death of the king's son. The dramatic exhibition of Mamillius by Shakspeare is amongst the most charming of his sketches. The affection of the father for his boy in the midst of his distraction, and the tenderness of the poor child, to whom his father's ravings are unintelligible—

"I am like you, they say,"—

are touches of nature such as only one man has produced. How must he have studied the inmost character of childhood to have given us the delicious little scene of the second act!—

Her. What wisdom stirs amongst you?

Come, sir, now,

I am for you again: Pray you, sit by us,
And tell's a tale.

Mam. Merry, or sad, shall't be?

Her. As merry as you will.

Mam. A sad tale's best
for winter:

I have one of sprites and goblins.

Her. Let's have that, good sir.

Come on, sit down:—Come on, and do your
best

To fright me with your sprites: you're
powerful at it.

Mam. There was a man,—

Her. Nay, come, sit down: then on.

Mam. Dwelt by a churchyard;—I will tell
it softly;

Yon crickets shall not hear it.

Her. Come on then,
And give't me in mine ear."

It requires the subsequent charm of a Perdita to put that poor boy out of our thoughts.

The story of the preservation of the deserted infant is prettily told in the novel:—

"It fortune'd a poor mercenary shepherd that dwelt in Sicilia, who got his living by other men's flocks, missed one of his sheep, and,

thinking it had strayed into the covert that was hard by, sought very diligently to find that which he could not see, fearing either that the wolves or eagles had undone him (for he was so poor as a sheep was half his substance), wandered down towards the sea-cliffs to see if perchance the sheep was browsing on the sea-ivy, whereon they greatly do feed; but not finding her there, as he was ready to return to his flock he heard a child cry, but, knowing there was no house near, he thought he had mistaken the sound, and that it was the bleating of his sheep. Wherefore looking more narrowly, as he cast his eye to the sea he spied a little boat, from whence, as he attentively listened, he might hear the cry to come. Standing a good while in amaze, at last he went to the shore, and, wading to the boat, as he looked in he saw the little babe lying all alone ready to die for hunger and cold, wrapped in a mantle of scarlet richly embroidered with gold, and having a chain about the neck."

Although the circumstances of the child's exposure are different, Shakspeare adopts the shepherd's discovery pretty literally. He even makes him about to seek his sheep by the sea-side, "browsing on the sea-ivy." The infant in the novel is taken to the shepherd's home, and is brought up by his wife and himself under the name of Fawnia. In a narrative the lapse of sixteen years may occur without any violation of propriety. The shepherd of Greene, every night at his coming home, would sing to the child and dance it on his knee: then, a few lines onward, the little Fawnia is seven years old; and very shortly,

"when she came to the age of sixteen years she so increased with exquisite perfection both of body and mind, as her natural disposition did bewray that she was born of some high parentage."

These changes, we see, are gradual. But in a drama, whose action depends upon a manifest lapse of time, there must be a sudden transition. Shakspeare is perfectly aware of the difficulty; and he diminishes it by the introduction of Time as a Chorus:—

"Impute it not a crime
To me, or my swift passage, that I slide

O'er sixteen years, and leave the growth
untried

Of that wide gap; since it is in my power
To o'erthrow law, and in one self born hour
To plant and o'erwhelm custom."

Lyly, without such an apology, gives us a lapse of forty years in his 'Endymion.' Dryden and Pope depreciated the 'Winter's Tale!' and no doubt this violation of the unity of time was one of the causes which blinded them to its exquisite beauties. But Dr. Johnson, without any special notice of the case before us, has made a triumphant defence against the French critics of Shakspeare's general disregard of the unities of time and place:—

"By supposition, as place is introduced, time may be extended; the time required by the fable elapses for the most part between the acts; for, of so much of the action as is represented, the real and poetical duration is the same. If, in the first act, preparations for war against Mithridates are represented to be made in Rome, the event of the war may, without absurdity, be represented in the catastrophe as happening in Pontus. We know that there is neither war nor preparation for war; we know that we are neither in Rome nor Pontus—that neither Mithridates nor Lucullus are before us. The drama exhibits successive imitations of successive actions, and why may not the second imitation represent an action that happened years after the first, if it be so connected with it that nothing but time can be supposed to intervene? Time is, of all modes of existence, most obsequious to the imagination; a lapse of years is as easily conceived as a passage of hours. In contemplation we easily contract the time of real actions, and therefore willingly permit it to be contracted when we only see their imitation."*

Shakspeare has exhibited his consummate art in opening the fourth act with Polixenes and Camillo, of whom we have lost sight since the end of the first. Had it been otherwise,—had he brought Autolycus, and Florizel, and Perdita, at once upon the scene,—the continuity of action would have been destroyed; and the commencement of the fourth act would have appeared as the

* Preface to his edition of 1765.

commencement of a new play. Shakspeare made the difficulties of his plot bend to his art; instead of wanting art, as Ben Jonson says. Autolycus and the Clown prepare us for Perdita; and when the third scene opens, what a beautiful vision lights upon this earth! There perhaps never was such a union of perfect simplicity and perfect grace as in the character of Perdita. What an exquisite idea of her mere personal appearance is presented in Florizel's rapturous exclamation,—

“When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that!”

Greene, in describing the beauties of his shepherdess, deals only in generalities:—

“It happened not long after this that there was a meeting of all the farmers' daughters in Sicilia, whither Fawnia was also bidden as the mistress of the feast, who, having attired herself in her best garments, went among the rest of her companions to the merry meeting, there spending the day in such homely pastimes as shepherds use. As the evening grew on and their sports ceased, each taking their leave at other, Fawnia, desiring one of her companions to bear her company, went home by the flock to see if they were well folded; and, as they returned, it fortuned that Dorastus (who all that day had been hawking, and killed store of game) encountered by the way these two maids, and, casting his eye suddenly on Fawnia, he was half afraid, fearing that with Acteon he had seen Diana, for he thought such exquisite perfection could not be found in any mortal creature. As thus he stood in amaze, one of his pages told him that the maid with the garland on her head was Fawnia, the fair shepherd whose beauty was so much talked of in the court. Dorastus, desirous to see if nature had adorned her mind with any inward qualities, as she had decked her body with outward shape, began to question with her whose daughter she was, of what age, and how she had been trained up? who answered him with such modest reverence and sharpness of wit, that Dorastus thought her outward beauty was but a counterfeit to darken her inward qualities, wondering how so courtly behaviour could be found in so simple a cottage, and cursing fortune that had shadowed wit and beauty with such hard fortune.”

But Greene was unequal to conceive the grace of mind which distinguishes Perdita:—

“Sir, my gracious lord,
To chide at your extremes it not becomes me;
O, pardon, that I name them: your high self,
The gracious mark o' the land, you have
obscur'd
With a swain's wearing; and me, poor lowly
maid,
Most goddess-like prank'd up.”

Contrast this with Greene:—

“Fawnia, poor soul, was no less joyful that, being a shepherd, fortune had favoured her so as to reward her with the love of a prince, *hoping in time to be advanced from the daughter of a poor farmer to be the wife of a rich king.*”

Here we see a vulgar ambition, rather than a deep affection. Fawnia, in the hour of discovery and danger, was quite incapable of exhibiting the feminine dignity of Perdita:—

“I was not much afeard: for once, or twice,
I was about to speak; and tell him plainly,
The selfsame sun that shines upon his court
Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
Looks on alike.—Will't please you, sir, be
gone?
[to FLORIZEL.
I told you what would come of this: 'Beseech
you,
Of your own state take care: this dream of
mine,
Being now awake, I'll queen it no inch
farther,
But milk my ewes, and weep.”

This is something higher than the sentiment of a “queen of curds and cream.”

In the novel we have no trace of the interruption by the father of the princely lover in the disguise of a guest at the shepherd's cottage. Dorastus and Fawnia flee from the country without the knowledge of the king. The ship in which they embark is thrown by a storm upon the coast of Bohemia. Messengers are despatched in search of the lovers; and they arrive in Bohemia with the request of Egistus that the companions in the flight of Dorastus shall be put to death. The secret of Fawnia's birth is discovered by the shepherd; and her father recognises her. But the previous

censure of the English poets was this." Censure is here, of course, put for opinion; although Jonson's opinions are by no means favourable to any one of whom he speaks. Spenser's stanzas pleased him not, or his matter; Sir John Harrington's 'Ariosto,' under all translations, was the worst; Abraham France was a fool; Sidney did not keep a decorum in making every one speak as well as himself; Shakspeare wanted art. And so, during two centuries, a mob of critics have caught up the word, and with the most knowing winks, and the most profound courtesies to each other's sagacity, have they echoed—"Shakspeare wanted art." But a cunning interpolator, who knew the temper of the critics, the anonymous editor of Cibber's 'Lives of the Poets,' took the "heads of a conversation" between Jonson and Drummond, prefixed to Drummond's works in 1711, and bestowed a few finishing touches upon them, after his own fashion. And thus, to the great joy of the denouncers of anachronisms, and other Shakspearean absurdities, as they are pleased to call them, we have read as follows for a hundred years:—"He said, Shakspeare wanted Art, *and sometimes Sense*; for, in one of his plays, he brought in a number of men, saying they had suffered shipwreck in Bohemia, where is no sea near by 100 miles." Jonson, indeed, makes the observation upon the shipwreck in Bohemia, but without any comment upon it. It is found in another part of Drummond's record, quite separate from "Shakspeare wanted art;" a casual remark, side by side with Jonson's gossip about Sidney's pimpled face and Raleigh's plagiaries. It was probably mentioned by Jonson as an illustration of some principle upon which Shakspeare worked; and in the same way "Shakspeare wanted art" was in all likelihood explained by him, in producing instances of the mode in which Shakspeare's art differed from his (Jonson's) art. It is impossible to receive Jonson's words as any support of the

absurd opinion so long propagated that Shakspeare worked without labour and without method. Jonson's own testimony, delivered five years after the conversation with Drummond, offers the most direct evidence against such a construction of his expression:—

"Yet must I not give Nature all: thy art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
For though the poet's matter Nature be,
His art doth give the fashion: and that he
Who casts to write a living line must sweat
(Such as thine are), and strike the second
heat
Upon the Muses' anvil: turn the same
(And himself with it) that he thinks to frame;
Or, for the laurel, he may gain a scorn,—
For a good poet's made as well as born:
And such wert thou."

There can be no difficulty in understanding Jonson's dispraise of Shakspeare, small as it was, when we look at the different characters of the two men. Jonson, in all likelihood, did not intend to impute an ignorant *blunder* to Shakspeare, but a wilful inconsistency. Mr. Collier has quoted a passage from Taylor, the water-poet, who published his 'Journey to Prague,' in which the honest waterman laughs at an alderman who "catches me by the goll, demanding if Bohemia be a great town, whether there be any meat in it, and whether the last fleet of ships be arrived there." Mr. Collier infers that Taylor "ridicules a vulgar error of the kind" committed by Shakspeare. We rather think that he meant to ridicule very gross ignorance generally; and we leave our readers to take their choice of placing Green and Shakspeare in the same class with Taylor's "Gregory Gandergoose, an Alderman of Gotham," or of believing that a confusion of time and place was considered (whether justly is not here the question) a proper characteristic of the legendary drama—such as 'A Winter's Tale.'

CHAPTER II.

CYMBELINE.

'THE Tragedie of Cymbeline' was first printed in the folio collection of 1623. The play is very carefully divided into acts and scenes—an arrangement which is sometimes wanting in other plays of the folio edition.

We have in previous chapters given extracts from "a book of plays and notes thereof, for common policy," kept by Dr. Symon Forman, in 1610 and 1611. These notes, which were discovered and first printed by Mr. Collier, contain not only an account of some play of Richard II., at which the writer was present, but distinctly give the plots of Shakspeare's 'Winter's Tale,' 'Macbeth,' and 'Cymbeline.' We shall take the liberty of reprinting from Mr. Collier's 'New Particulars' Forman's account of the plot of 'Cymbeline':—

"Remember, also, the story of Cymbeline, King of England, in Lucius' time: how Lucius came from Octavius Cæsar for tribute, and, being denied, after sent Lucius with a great army of soldiers, who landed at Milford Haven, and after were vanquished by Cymbeline, and Lucius taken prisoner, and all by means of three outlaws, of the which two of them were the sons of Cymbeline, stolen from him when they were but two years old, by an old man whom Cymbeline had banished; and he kept them as his own sons twenty years with him in a cave. And how one of them slew Cloten, that was the Queen's son, going to Milford Haven to seek the love of Imogen the King's daughter, whom he had banished also for loving his daughter.

"And how the Italian that came from her love conveyed himself in a chest, and said it was a chest of plate sent from her love and others to be presented to the King. And in the deepest of the night, she being asleep, he opened the chest and came forth of it, and viewed her in her bed, and the marks of her body, and took away her bracelet, and after accused her of adultery to her love, &c. And, in the end, how he came with the Romans into England, and was taken prisoner, and after revealed to Imogen, who had turned herself into man's

apparel, and fled to meet her love at Milford Haven; and chanced to fall on the cave in the woods where her two brothers were: and how by eating a sleeping dram they thought she had been dead, and laid her in the woods, and the body of Cloten by her, in her love's apparel that he left behind him, and how she was found by Lucius," &c.

"This," Mr. Collier adds, "is curious; principally because it gives the impression of the plot upon the mind of the spectator, *at about the time when the play was first produced.*" We can scarcely yield our implicit assent to this. Forman's note-book is evidence that the play existed in 1610 or 1611; but it is not evidence that it was first produced in 1610 or 1611. Mr. Collier, in his 'Annals of the Stage,' gives us the following entry from the books of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels:—"On Wednesday night the first of January, 1633, 'Cymbeline' was acted at Court by the King's players. Well liked by the King." Here is a proof that for more than twenty years *after* Forman saw it 'Cymbeline' was still acted, and still popular. By parity of reasoning it might have been acted, and might have been popular, *before* Forman saw it.

Coleridge, in his classification of 1819, places 'Cymbeline,' as he supposes it to have been originally produced, in the *first epoch*, to which he assigns 'Pericles.' "In the same epoch I place 'The Winter's Tale' and 'Cymbeline,' differing from the Pericles by the entire *rifacimento* of it, when Shakspeare's celebrity as poet, and his interest no less than his influence as manager, enabled him to bring forward the laid-by labours of his youth." Tieck, whilst he considers it "the last work of the great poet, which may have been written about 1614 or 1615," adds, "it is also not impossible that this varied-woven romantic history had inspired the poet in his youth to attempt it for the stage." Tieck assigns no reason for believing that the play

as we have received it is of so late a date as 1614 or 1615. Malone has observed, and we think very justly (for in matters in which he was not tainted by the influences of his age his opinions are to be respected), that its versification resembles that of 'The Winter's Tale' and 'The Tempest.' To whatever age these romantic dramas shall be ultimately assigned we have no doubt that on every account—from the nature of the fable, as well as the cast of thought, and the construction of the language—'Cymbeline' will go with them. But, however this may be, we heartily join in the belief, so distinctly expressed by two such master-minds as Coleridge and Tieck, that the *sketch* of 'Cymbeline' belongs to the youthful Shakspeare. We have fancied that it is almost possible to trace in some instances the dove-tailing of the original with the improved drama. The principal incidents of the story of Imogen are in Boccaccio. Of course, with reference to the knowledge of Shakspeare, we do not hold with Steevens that they, "in their original Italian, to him at least, were inaccessible." Such a fable was exactly one which would have been seized upon by him who, from the very earliest period of his career, saw, in those reflections of life which the Italian novelists present, the materials of bringing out the manifold aspects of human nature in the most striking forms of truth and beauty. As far as the main action of the drama was concerned, therefore, we hold that it was as accessible to the Shakspeare of five-and-twenty as it was to the Shakspeare of five-and-forty; and that he had not to wait for the publication in 1603 of a story-book in which the tales which were the common property of Europe were remodelled with English scenes and characters, to have produced 'Cymbeline.' All the historical accessories too of the story were familiar to him in his early career. Assuming, then, that 'Cymbeline' might have been sketched at an early period, and comparing it more especially with 'Pericles,' which assuredly has not been re-written, we venture to express a belief that the scenes have, in some parts, been greatly elaborated; and that this elaboration has had the effect of

thrusting forward such a quantity of incidents into the fifth act as to have rendered it absolutely necessary to resort to pantomimic action or dumb show, an example of which occurs in no other of Shakspeare's works. This might have been remedied by omitting the "apparition" in the fifth act, which either belongs not to Shakspeare at all, or belongs to the period when he had not clearly seen his way to shake off the trammels of the old stage. But would an audience familiar with that scene have parted with it? We believe not. The fifth act, as we think, presents to us very strikingly the differences between the young and the mature Shakspeare, always bearing in mind that the skill of such a master of his art has rendered it very difficult to conjecture what were the differences between his sketch and his finished picture. The soliloquy of Posthumus in that Act, in its fulness of thought, belongs to the finished performance,—the minute stage directions which follow to the unfinished. Nothing can be more certain than that the dialogue between Posthumus and the gaoler is of the period of deep philosophical speculation; while the tablet left by Jupiter has a wondrous resemblance to the odd things of the early stage. The greater part of the play is certainly such as no one but Shakspeare could have written, and not only so, but Shakspeare in the full possession and habitual exercise of his powers. The mountain scenes with Imogen and her brothers are perhaps unequalled, even in the whole compass of the Shakspearean drama. They are of the very highest order of poetical beauty,—not such an outpouring of beauty as in the 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'The Midsummer's Night's Dream,' where the master of harmonious verse revels in all the graces of his art—but of beauty entirely subservient to the peculiarities of the characters, the progress of the action, the scenery, ay, and the very period of the drama, whatever Dr. Johnson may say of "incongruity." There is nothing to us more striking than the contrast which is presented between the free natural lyrics sung by the brothers over the grave of Fidele, and the elegant poem which some have thought so much more beautiful.

The one is perfectly in keeping with all that precedes and all that follows; the other is entirely out of harmony with its associations. "To fair Fidele's grassy tomb" is the dirge of *Collins* over Fidele; "Fear no more the heat o' the sun" is Fidele's proper funeral song by her bold *brothers*. It is this marvellous power of going out of himself that renders it so difficult to say that Shakspeare is at any time inferior to himself. If it were not for this exercise of power, even in the smallest characters, we might think that Cloten was of the immature Shakspeare. But then he has made Cloten his own, by one or two magical touches, so as to leave no doubt that, if he was at first a somewhat hasty sketch, he is now a finished portrait. "The snatches in his voice and burst of speaking" identify him as the "very Cloten" that none other but Shakspeare could have painted.

"Mr. Pope," says Steevens, "supposed the story of this play to have been borrowed from a novel of Boccaccio; but he was mistaken, as an imitation of it is found in an old story-book entitled 'Westward for Smelts.'" This is unquestionably one of Steevens' random assertions. Malone has printed the tale, and has expressed his opinion, in opposition to that of Steevens, that the general scheme of *Cymbeline* is founded on Boccaccio's novel (9th story of the second day of the *Decameron*). Mrs. Lennox has given, in her 'Shakspear Illustrated,' a paraphrase of Boccaccio's story; which she has mixed up with more irreverent impertinence towards Shakspeare than can be perhaps found elsewhere in the English language, except in Dr. Johnson's judgment upon this play, which sounds very like "prisoner at the bar." It might have been supposed that the odour of Mrs. Lennox's criticisms upon Shakspeare had been dissipated long before the close of the last century; but, nevertheless, Mr. Dunlop, in his 'History of Fiction,' published in 1816, makes the opinions of Mrs. Lennox his own: "The incidents of the novel have been very closely adhered to by Shakspeare, but, as has been remarked by an acute and elegant critic (Mrs. Lennox), the scenes and characters have been most injudiciously altered, and the

manners of a tradesman's wife, and two intoxicated Italian merchants, have been bestowed on a great princess, a British hero, and a noble Roman." Mr. Dunlop, however, has given a neat abridgment of the tale; and in this matter it will be sufficient to refer the general reader to his work, and the Italian student to Boccaccio.

Shakspeare found his historical materials in Holinshed; and he has adhered to them as far as is consistent with the progress of a romantic story.

Criticism, even of that school to which we now yield our obedience—the school which has cast off the shackles of the unities, and judges of the romantic drama by its own laws—has not looked very enthusiastically upon 'Cymbeline' as a dramatic whole. To the exquisite character of Imogen, taken apart, full justice has been done. Richardson, not often a very profound critic, has seized upon the leading points with great correctness, and has carried them out with elegance, if not with force. Nothing can be more just, for example, than this observation: "The sense of misfortune, rather than the sense of injury, rules the disposition of Imogen."* Mrs. Jameson, again, has analysed the character with her usual acuteness and delicacy of perception: "Others of Shakspeare's characters are, as dramatic and poetic conceptions, more striking, more brilliant, more powerful; but of all his women, considered as individuals rather than as heroines, Imogen is the most perfect."† But the relation of Imogen, as the centre of a dramatic circle, has scarcely, we think, been adequately pointed out. We pass over what Dr. Johnson says, in a tone of criticism which belongs as much to the age as to the man, about "the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life." When Johnson wrote this, he reposed upon an implicit belief in his own canons of criticism—the opinions upon which Thomas Warton has explained his own depreciation of Ariosto and Spenser: "We, who live in the days of

* 'Essays on Shakspeare's Dramatic Characters.'

† 'Characteristics of Women,' vol. ii. p. 50.

writing by rule, are apt to try every composition by those laws which we have been taught to think the sole criterion of excellence. Critical taste is universally diffused, and we require the same order and design which every modern performance is expected to have, in poems where they never were regarded or intended." Warton was a man of too high taste not in some degree to despise this "criterion of excellence;" but he did not dare to avow the heresy in his own day. We have outlived all this. The "critical taste" to which Warton alludes belongs only to the history of criticism. But, even amongst those upon whom we have been accustomed to rely as infallible guides, it does appear to us that 'Cymbeline' has been, in some degree, considered a departure from the great law of unity—not of time, nor of place, but of feeling—which Shakspeare has unquestionably prescribed to himself. Neither Tieck nor Schlegel, according to their usual custom, attempt to show that any predominant idea runs through 'Cymbeline.' They each speak of it as a succession of splendid scenes, and high poetry; and, indeed, it cannot be denied that these attributes of this drama most forcibly seize upon the mind, somewhat, perhaps, to the exclusion of its real action. We venture to express our opinion that one predominant idea does exist; although Coleridge, even more distinctly than the German critics, if we apprehend him rightly, inferred the contrary:—"In the 'Twelfth Night,' 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'As You Like It,' and 'Winter's Tale,' the total effect is produced by a co-ordination of the characters as in a wreath of flowers. But in 'Coriolanus,' 'Lear,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Hamlet,' 'Othello,' &c., the effect arises from the subordination of all to one, either as the prominent person, or the principal object." Coleridge is speaking of the great significance of the names of Shakspeare's plays. The consonancy of the names with the leading ideas of each drama is exemplified in this passage. He then adds—" 'Cymbeline' is the only exception;" that is, the name of 'Cymbeline' neither expresses the co-ordination of the characters, nor the principal object.

He goes on to say,—“Even that (the name of 'Cymbeline') has its advantages in preparing the audience for the chaos of time, place, and costume, by throwing the date back into a fabulous king's reign.” We do not understand that Coleridge meant to say that the play of 'Cymbeline' had neither co-ordination of characters nor a prominent object; but we do apprehend that the name was symbolical, in his belief, of the main features of the play—the chaos of time, place, and costume. For he proceeds, immediately, to remark, in reference to the judgment displayed by our truly dramatic poet in the management of his first scenes, “*With the single exception of 'Cymbeline,'* they place before us at one glance both the past and the future in some effect, which implies the continuance and full agency of its cause.”* We venture to believe that 'Cymbeline' does not form an exception to the usual course pursued by Shakspeare in the management of his first scenes; and that the first scenes of 'Cymbeline' do place before us the past and the future in a way which we think very strikingly discloses what he intended to be the leading idea of his drama.

The dialogue of the “two Gentlemen” in the opening scene makes us perfectly acquainted with the relations in which Posthumus and Imogen stand to each other, and to those around them. “She's wedded, her husband banish'd.” We have next the character of the banished husband, and of the unworthy suitor who is the cause of his banishment; as well as the story of the king's two lost sons. This is essentially the foundation of the past and future of the action. Brief indeed is this scene, but it well prepares us for the parting of Posthumus and Imogen. The course of their affections is turned awry by the wills of others. The angry king at once proclaims himself to us as one not cruel, but weak; he has before been described as “touch'd at very heart.” It is only in the intensity of her affection for Posthumus that Imogen opposes her own will to the impatient violence of her father, and the more crafty decision of her step-

* 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 207.

mother. But she is surrounded with a third evil,—

“A father cruel, and a step-dame false,
A foolish suitor to a wedded lady.”

Worse, however, even than these, her honour is to be assailed, her character vilified, by a subtle stranger; who, perhaps more in sport than in malice, has resolved to win a paltry wager by the sacrifice of her happiness and that of her husband. What has she to oppose to all this complication of violence and cunning? Her perfect purity—her entire simplicity—her freedom from everything that is selfish—the strength only of her affections. The scene between Iachimo and Imogen is a contest of innocence with guile, most profoundly affecting, in spite of the few coarsenesses that were perhaps unavoidable, and which were not considered offensive in Shakspeare's day. The supreme beauty of Imogen's character soars triumphantly out of the impure mist which is around her; and not the least part of that beauty is her ready forgiveness of her assailant, briefly and flutteringly expressed, however, when he relies upon the possibility of deceiving her through her affections:—

“O happy Leonatus! I may say:
The credit that thy lady hath of thee
Deserves thy trust; and thy most perfect
goodness
Her assured credit!”

This is the First Act; and, if we mistake not the object of Shakspeare, these opening scenes exhibit one of the most confiding and gentle of human beings, assailed on every side by a determination of purpose, whether in the shape of violence, wickedness, or folly, against which, under ordinary circumstances, innocence may be supposed to be an insufficient shield. But the very helplessness of Imogen is her protection. In the exquisite Second Scene of the Second Act, the perfect purity of Imogen, as interpreted by Shakspeare, has converted what would have been a most dangerous situation in the hands of another poet—Fletcher, for example—into one of the most refined delicacy:—

“’T is her breathing that
Perfumes the chamber thus.”

The immediate danger is passed; but there is a new danger approaching. The will of her unhappy husband, deceived into madness, is to be added to the evils which she has already received from violence and selfishness. Posthumus, intending to destroy her, writes, “Take notice that I am in Cambria, at Milford-Haven; what your own love will out of this advise you, follow.” She does follow her own love;—she has no other guide but the strength of her affections; that strength makes her hardy and fearless of consequences. It is the one duty, as well as the one pleasure, of her existence. How is that affection requited? Pisanio places in her hand, when they have reached the deepest solitude of the mountains, that letter by which he is commanded to take away her life. One passing thought of herself—one faint reproach of her husband,—and she submits to the fate which is prepared for her:—

“Come, fellow, be thou honest:
Do thou thy master's bidding: When thou
see'st him,
A little witness my obedience: Look!
I draw the sword myself: take it; and hit
The innocent mansion of my love, my heart.”

But her truth and innocence have already subdued the will of the sworn servant of her husband. He comforts her, but he necessarily leaves her in the wilderness. The spells of evil wills are still around her:—

“My noble mistress,
Here is a box: I had it from the queen.”

Perhaps there is nothing in Shakspeare more beautifully managed,—more touching in its romance,—more essentially true to nature,—than the scene between Imogen and her unknown brothers. The gentleness, the grace, the “grief and patience,” of the helpless Fidele, producing at once the deepest reverence and affection in the bold and daring mountaineers, still carry forward the character of Imogen under the same aspects. Belarius has beautifully described the brothers:—

“They are as gentle
As zephyrs, blowing below the violet,

Not wagging his sweet head: and yet, as
rough,
Their royal blood enchafed, as the rud'st wind,
That by the top doth take the mountain pine,
And make him stoop to the vale."

It was in their gentleness that Imogen found a support for her gentleness;—it was in their roughness that the roughness of Cloten met its punishment. Imogen is still saved from the dangers with which craft and violence have surrounded her. When she swallows the supposed medicine of the queen, we know beforehand that the evil intentions of her step-mother have been counteracted by the benevolent intentions of the physician:—

"I do know her spirit,
And will not trust one of her malice with
A drug of such damn'd nature."

"The 'bird is dead;" she was sick, and we almost fear that the words of the dirge are true:—

"Fear no more the frown o' the great,
Thou art pass'd the tyrant's stroke.

But she awakes, and she has still to endure the last and the worst evil—her husband, in her apprehension, lies dead before her. She has no wrongs to think of—"O my lord, my lord," is all, in connexion with Posthumus, that escapes amidst her tears. The beauty and innocence which saved her from Iachimo,—which conquered Pisanio,—which won the wild hunters,—commend her to the Roman general—she is at once protected. But she has holy duties still to perform:—

"I'll follow, sir. But, first, an't please the
gods,
I'll hide my master from the flies, as deep
As these poor pickaxes can dig: and when
With wild wood-leaves and weeds I have
strew'd his grave,
And on it said a century of prayers,
Such as I can, twice o'er, I'll weep and sigh;
And, leaving so his service, follow you,
So please you entertain me."

It is the unconquerable affection of Imogen which makes us pity Posthumus even while we blame him for the rash exercise of his revengeful will. But in his deep repentance we more than pity him. We see only

another victim of worldly craft and selfishness:—

"Gods! if you
Should have ta'en vengeance on my faults, I
never
Had lived to put on this; so had you saved
The noble Imogen to repent; and struck
Me, wretch, more worth your vengeance."

In the prison scene his spirit is again united with hers:—

"O Imogen,
I'll speak to thee in silence.

The contest we now feel is over between the selfish and the unselfish, the crafty and the simple, the proud and the meek, the violent and the gentle.

It is scarcely within our purpose to follow the unravelling of the incidents in the concluding scene. Steevens has worthily endeavoured to make amends for the injustice of the criticism which 'Cymbeline' has received from his associate commentator:—"Let those who talk so confidently about the skill of Shakspeare's contemporary, Jonson, point out the conclusion of any one of his plays which is wrought with more artifice, and yet a less degree of dramatic violence, than this. In the scene before us, all the surviving characters are assembled; and at the expense of whatever incongruity the former events may have been produced, perhaps little can be discovered on this occasion to offend the most scrupulous advocate for regularity: and, I think, as little is found wanting to satisfy the spectator by a catastrophe which is intricate without confusion, and not more rich in ornament than in nature."

The conclusion of 'Cymbeline' has been lauded because it is consistent with *poetical justice*. Those who adopt this species of reasoning look very imperfectly upon the course of real events in the moral world. It is permitted, for inscrutable purposes, that the innocent should sometimes fall before the wicked, and the noble be subjected to the base. In the same way, it is sometimes in the course of events that the pure and the gentle should triumph over deceit and outrage. The perishing of Desdemona is as *true* as the safety of Imogen; and the poetical

truth involves as high a moral in the one case as in the other. That Shakspeare's notion of poetical justice was not the hackneyed notion of an intolerant age, reflected even by a Boccaccio, is shown by the difference in the lot of the offender in the Italian tale and the lot of Iachimo. The Ambrogiolo of the novelist, who slanders a virtuous lady for the gain of a wager, is fastened to a stake, smeared with honey, and left to be devoured by flies and locusts. The close of our dramatist's story is perfect Shakspeare:—

Post. Speak, Iachimo; I had you down,
and might

Have made you finish.

Iach. I am down again;
But now my heavy conscience sinks my knee,
As then your force did. Take that life,
'beseech you,
Which I so often owe: but, your ring first;
And here the bracelet of the truest princess,
That ever swore her faith.

Post. Kneel not to me;
The power that I have on you is to spare you;
The malice towards you to forgive you: Live,
And deal with others better.

Cym. Nobly doom'd:
We'll learn our freeness of a son-in-law;
Pardon's the word to all."

CHAPTER III.

THE TEMPEST.

THIS comedy stands the first in the folio collection of 1623, in which edition it was originally printed. In the entry upon the Stationers' registers of November the 8th, 1623, claiming for the booksellers Blount and Jaggard such plays of Shakspeare "as were not formerly entered to other men," it also is the first in order. The original text is printed with singular correctness.

A very general belief has always prevailed that 'The Tempest' was the last of Shakspeare's works. We are inclined to think that this belief was rather a matter of feeling than of judgment. Mr. Campbell has put the feeling very elegantly:—"The Tempest' has a sort of sacredness as the last work of a mighty workman. Shakspeare, as if conscious that it would be his last, and as if inspired to typify himself, has made his hero a natural, a dignified, and benevolent magician, who could conjure up spirits from the vasty deep, and command supernatural agency by the most seemingly natural and simple means. And this final play of our poet has magic indeed; for, what can be simpler in language than the courtship of Ferdinand and Miranda, and yet what can be more magical than the sympathy with which it subdues us? Here

Shakspeare himself is Prospero, or rather the superior genius who commands both Prospero and Ariel. But the time was approaching when the potent sorcerer was to break his staff, and to bury it fathoms in the ocean,

'Deeper than did ever plummet sound.'

That staff has never been, and never will be, recovered." But this feeling, pretty and fanciful as it is, is certainly somewhat deceptive. It is not borne out by the internal evidence of the play itself. Shakspeare never could have contemplated, in health and intellectual vigour, any abandonment of that occupation which constituted his happiness and glory. We have no doubt that he wrote on till the hour of his last illness. His later plays are unquestionably those in which the mighty intellect is more tasked than the unbounded fancy. His later plays, as we believe, present the philosophical and historical aspect of human affairs rather than the passionate and the imaginative. The Roman historical plays are, as it appears to us, at the end of his career, as the English historical plays are at the beginning. Nothing can be more different than the principle of art upon which the 'Henry VI.' and the

'Antony and Cleopatra' are constructed. The Roman plays denote, we think, the growth of an intellect during five-and-twenty years. 'The Tempest' does not present the characteristics of the latest plays. It has the playfulness and beauty of the comedies, mingled with the higher notes of passionate and solemn thought which distinguished the great tragedies. It is essentially, too, written wholly with reference to the stage, at a period when an Ariel could be presented to an imaginative audience without the prosaic encumbrance of wings. The later plays, such as 'Troilus and Cressida,' and the three Roman subjects, are certainly written without any very strong regard to dramatic effect. They are noble acting plays, especially 'Julius Cæsar' and 'Coriolanus;' but even in these the poet appears to have poured himself forth with a philosophical mastery of the great principles by which men are held in the social state, without being very solicitous as to the favourable reception of his opinions by the mixed audiences of the days of James I. The 'Antony and Cleopatra' is still more remarkable for its surpassing historical truth—not the mere truth of chronological exactness, but that truth which is evolved out of the power of making the past present and real, through the marvellous felicity of knowing and representing how individuals and masses of men must have acted under circumstances which are only assimilated to the circumstances of modern times by the fact that all the great principles and motives of human action are essentially the same in every age and in every condition of civilization. The plays that we have mentioned must have been the result of very profound thought and very accurate investigation. The characters of the 'Troilus and Cressida' are purposely Gothicised. An episode of "the tale of Troy divine" is seized upon, to be divested of its romantic attributes, and to be presented with all the bold colouring of a master regardless of minute proprieties of costume, but producing the most powerful and harmonious effect through the universal truth of his delineations. On the contrary, the Roman plays are perfect in costume. We do not believe

that there are any productions of the human mind in existence, ancient or modern, which can give us so complete a notion of what Roman life was under its great general aspects. This was the effect, not only of his instinctive wisdom, but of that leisure for profound inquiry and extensive investigation which Shakspeare possessed in the latter years of his life. We cannot bring ourselves to believe that 'The Tempest' belonged to the latest period. Ulrici has said "'The Tempest' is the completing companion-piece of the 'Winter's Tale' and 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream.'" The 'Midsummer-Night's Dream' was printed in 1600;—it was probably written some five or six years previous. The 'Winter's Tale' was acted in 1611. From the 'Extracts from the Accounts of the Revels at Court,' edited by Mr. Peter Cunningham, we learn that on Hallowmas Night (November 1), 1611, "was presented at Whitehall, before the King's Majesty, a play called 'The Tempest.'" Four nights afterwards the 'Winter's Tale' was also presented. The 'Winter's Tale' appears to us to bear marks of a later composition than 'The Tempest.' But we are not disposed to separate them by any very wide interval: more especially we cannot agree with Mr. Hunter, who has brought great learning to an investigation of all the points connected with 'The Tempest,' that this play, "instead of being the latest work of this great master, is in reality one of the earliest, nearly the first in time, as the first in place, of the dramas which are wholly his." The difficulty of settling the chronology of some of Shakspeare's plays by internal evidence is very much increased by the circumstance that some of them must be regarded as early performances that have come down to us with the large additions and corrections of maturer years. For example: 'Pericles' was, it is probable, produced as a novelty in 1608, or not long before. There are portions of that play which we think no one could have written but the mature Shakspeare; mixed up with other portions which indicate, not so much immature powers as the treatment of a story in the spirit of the oldest dramas. So it is with 'Cymbeline;' and, to

a certain extent, with the 'Winter's Tale.' The probability is, that these plays were produced in their present form soon after the period of Shakspeare's quitting the stage about 1603; and perhaps before the production of 'Macbeth,' 'Troilus and Cressida,' 'Henry VIII.,' and the Roman plays. 'The Tempest' appears to us to belong to the same cycle. The opinion which we here express is not inconsistent with a belief that Mr. Hunter has brought forward several curious facts to render it highly probable that it was produced in 1596. But the aggregate evidence, as we think, outweighs these curious facts.

'The Tempest' is *not* included by name in the list of plays ascribed to Shakspeare by Francis Meres in 1599. Mr. Hunter says that it *was* included, under the name of '*Love's Labour Won.*' We have endeavoured to show, in the Chapter on 'All's Well that Ends Well,' not only that the comedy bearing that name had the highest pretension to the title of '*Love's Labour Won.*' but that 'The Tempest' had no such pretension. We do not agree that the comedy called 'The Tempest,' when it was first printed, bore the title, either as a leading or secondary title, when Meres published his list in 1599, of '*Love's Labour Won.*' We believe that it was always called 'The Tempest;' and that, looking at its striking fable, and its beauty of characterization and language, it would undoubtedly have been mentioned by Meres if it had existed in 1599.

The 'Bartholomew Fair' of Ben Jonson was produced at the Hope Theatre in 1614; and it was performed by "the Lady Elizabeth's servants." It is stated by Malone that "it appears from MSS. of Mr. Vertue that 'The Tempest' was acted by John Heminge and the rest of the King's company, before Prince Charles, the Lady Elizabeth, and the Prince Palatine Elector, in the beginning of the year 1613." This circumstance gives some warrant to the belief of the commentators that a passage in the Induction to 'Bartholomew Fair' is a sarcasm upon Shakspeare:—"If there be never a *servant-monster* in the fair, who can help it, he says, nor a nest of antiques? He is loth to

make nature afraid in his plays, like those that beget *tales*, *tempests*, and such-like drolleries." Gifford has contended, arguing against the disposition of the commentators to charge Jonson with malignity, that the expressions *servant-monster*, and *tales*, *tempests*, and such-like *drolleries*, had reference to the popular puppet-shows which were especially called drolleries. The passage, however, still looks to us like a sly, though not ill-natured, allusion to Shakspeare's Caliban, and his 'Winter's Tale,' and 'Tempest,' which were then popular acting plays. Mr. Hunter believes that in this passage Jonson does pointedly direct his satire against 'The Tempest;' but he also maintains that Jonson does, in the same way, satirize 'The Tempest' in 1596, in the Prologue to 'Every Man in his Humour:'—

"He rather prays you will be pleased to see
One such to-day, as other plays should be;
Where neither chorus wafts you o'er the seas,
Nor creaking throne comes down the boys to
please:
Nor nimble squib is seen to make afeard
The gentlewomen; nor roll'd bullet heard,
To say, it thunders: nor tempestuous drum
Rumbles, to tell you when the storm doth
come."

It is scarcely probable, if Jonson had meant to allude to 'The Tempest,' either in the Prologue or the Induction, that he would have been so wanting in materials for his dislike of the romantic drama in general as to select the same play for attack in works separated by an interval of eighteen years. The "creaking throne" is, according to Mr. Hunter, the throne of Juno as she descends, in the mask; the "nimble squib" is the lightning, and the "tempestuous drum" the thunder, of the first scene. Mr. Hunter adds that the last line of the Prologue,—

"You that have so graced monsters may like
men,"—

must allude to Caliban. Surely the term *monsters*, as opposed to *men*, must be a general designation of what Jonson believed to be unnatural in the romantic drama, as contrasted with the "image of the times" in comedy. But, if we must have real monsters,

there were plenty to be found in the older plays. Gosson, in 1581, thus writes:—"Sometimes you shall see nothing but the adventures of an amorous knight, passing from country to country for the love of his lady, encountering many a terrible *monster*, made of brown paper, and at his return is so wonderfully changed that he cannot be known but by some posy in his tablet, or by a broken ring, or a handkerchief, or a piece of a cockle-shell." Sir Philip Sidney ridicules the appearance of "*a hideous monster*, with fire and smoke." Much older theatres than the Globe were furnished with their thunder and lightning. In 1572 John Izarde, according to an entry in the accounts of the revels at court, was paid for a device for "counterfeiting thunder and lightning."* It is as likely that thrones descended in other plays besides 'The Tempest,' as it is certain that in 'The Tempest' Juno descended with a classical fitness of which Jonson has given us many similar examples in his own masks. We can see nothing in these circumstances to connect the date of 'The Tempest' with that of Ben Jonson's 'Every Man in his Humour.'

The third point upon which Mr. Hunter relies for fixing the date of 'The Tempest,' as of 1596, is deduced from the passage in the third act where Gonzalo laughs at the stories of "men whose heads stood in their breasts." Raleigh told this story, in his account of his voyage to Guiana, in 1595. Shakspeare makes Othello, not in a boasting or lying spirit, but with the confiding belief that belonged to his own high nature, tell Desdemona of

"The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
Do grow beneath their shoulders."

Would Mr. Hunter contend that this second notice of "men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders" fixes the date of 'Othello,' as well as that of 'The Tempest,' in 1596? Such circumstances are, as we believe, of the very slightest value. The argument may be put ingeniously and learnedly, as Mr. Hunter puts it; or it may be rendered ludicrous, as Chalmers renders it. What, for example,

can be more absurd than Chalmers's attempt to make us believe that, because the King of Naples is inconsolable for the supposed loss of Ferdinand, there is an allusion to the death of Prince Henry in 1612; that the line

"Like poison given to work a great time after"
plainly refers to the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in the same year; and that a great storm which happened in January, 1613, "gave the appropriate name to this admirable drama!"

In the 'Essays' of Montaigne, as translated by Florio, there is the following passage:—

"Me seemeth that what in those nations we see by experience doth not only exceed all the pictures wherewith licentious poesy hath proudly embellished the golden age, and all her quaint inventions to feign a happy condition of man, but also the conception and desire of philosophy. They could not imagine a genuitie so pure and simple as we see it by experience; nor ever believe our society might be maintained with so little art and human combination. It is a nation, would I answer Plato, that hath no kind of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no intelligence of numbers, no name of magistrates, nor of politic superiority; no use of service, of riches, or of poverty; no contracts, no successions, no dividences; no occupation, but idle; no respect of kindred, but common; no apparel, but natural; no manuring of lands; no use of wine, corn, or metal. The very words that import lying, falsehood, treason, dissimulation, covetousness, envy, detraction, and pardon, were never heard amongst them. How dissonant would he find his imaginary commonwealth from this perfection!"

This extract establishes beyond all possible doubt that the lines of Gonzalo,—

"I the commonwealth I would by contraries
Execute all things," &c.—

were founded upon Montaigne, and upon Florio's translation. That translation was not published before 1603. But portions of it had been seen in manuscript, says Mr. Hunter. Sir William Cornwallis mentions in his 'Essays' that "divers of his pieces I have seen translated," and he describes Florio as the translator. The 'Essays' of Cornwallis were not printed till 1600; but they, also, had been seen in manuscript;

* Collier, 'Annals of the Stage,' vol. iii. p. 370.

and so Cornwallis might have written about "divers parts" of Florio's 'Montaigne' before 1596; and Shakspeare might have read this identical part of Florio's 'Montaigne' before 1596; and thus the dates both of Cornwallis's and Florio's books go for nothing in this inquiry. Is this *evidence*?

The date of Shakspeare's 'Tempest' has been a fertile subject for the exercise of critical conjecture. Malone writes a pamphlet of sixty pages upon it; Chalmers another pamphlet somewhat longer. The first has been reprinted in Boswell's edition; the other costs as much as a manuscript in the days before printing. It is worth the money, however, for a quiet laugh. The two critics differ very slightly in their opinions as to the date of the comedy; but their proofs are essentially different. Malone contends for 1611, holding that "the storm by which Sir George Sommers was shipwrecked on the island of Bermuda, in 1609, unquestionably gave rise to Shakspeare's 'Tempest,' and suggested to him the title, as well as some incidents." The whole relation is contained in the additions to Stow's 'Annals' by Howes:—

"In the year 1609 the Adventurers and Company of Virginia sent from London a fleet of eight ships, with people to supply and make strong the colony in Virginia; Sir Thomas Gates being general, in a ship of 300 tons: in this ship was also Sir George Sommers, who was admiral, and Captain Newport, vice-admiral, and with them about 160 persons. This ship was 'Admiral,' and kept company with the rest of the fleet to the height of 30 degrees; and, being then assembled to consult touching divers matters, they were surprised with a most extreme violent storm, which scattered the whole fleet, yet all the rest of the fleet bent their course for Virginia, where, by God's special favour, they arrived safely; but this great ship, though new, and far stronger than any of the rest, fell into a great leak, so as mariners and passengers were forced, for three days' space, to do their utmost to save themselves from sudden sinking: but notwithstanding their incessant pumping, and casting out of water by buckets and all other means, yet the water covered all the goods within the hold, and all men were utterly tired, and spent in strength, and overcome with labour;

and hopeless of any succour, most of them were gone to sleep, yielding themselves to the mercy of the sea, being all very desirous to die upon any shore wheresoever. Sir George Sommers, sitting at the stern, seeing the ship desperate of relief, looking every minute when the ship would sink, he espied land, which, according to his and Captain Newport's opinion, they judged it should be that dreadful coast of the Bermudas, which islands were, of all nations, said and supposed to be enchanted, and inhabited with witches and devils, which grew by reason of accustomed monstrous thunder-storm and tempest near unto those islands; also for that the whole coast is so wondrous dangerous of rocks that few can approach them but with unspeakable hazard of shipwreck. Sir George Sommers, Sir Thomas Gates, Captain Newport, and the rest, suddenly agreed of two evils to choose the least, and so, in a kind of desperate resolution, directed the ship mainly for these islands, which, by God's divine providence, at a high water ran right between two strong rocks, where it stuck fast without breaking, which gave leisure and good opportunity for them to hoist out their boat, and to land all their people, as well sailors as soldiers and others, in good safety; and being come ashore they were soon refreshed and cheered, the soil and air being most sweet and delicate."

Here we have a storm, a wreck, the Bermudas, and an enchanted island; and, in other descriptions of the same event, we have mention of a sea-monster. "Nothing can be more conclusive, then," says Malone, "that the date of the play is fixed, with uncommon precision, between the end of the year 1610 and the autumn of 1611." No, says Chalmers, the shipwreck of Sir George Sommers did suggest the incidents; but Malone himself had admitted that there was a great tempest at home in 1612;—"the author availed himself of a circumstance then fresh in the minds of his audience, by affixing a title to it which was more likely to excite curiosity than any other that he could have chosen, while, at the same time, it was sufficiently justified by the subject of the drama." "Now this tempest," says Chalmers, "happened at Christmas 1612; and so the play could not have been written in the summer of 1612." Surely all this is admirable fooling,

which is scarcely necessary to say is put an end to by the certainty that the play existed in 1611. In such minute inquiries, all assuming that poetry is to be dealt with by the same laws as chronology, or geography, or any other exact branch of knowledge, there can be nothing but perpetual mistake, and contradiction, and false inference. Chalmers, in some respects acute enough, has, through the indulgence of these propensities for making poetry literal, fallen into the mistake of imagining that Bermuda was the scene of 'The Tempest.' Mr. Hunter says, "No editor of Shakspeare has ever gone so far as to represent the island of Bermuda as actually the scene of this play;" but he adds, "Chalmers has given some encouragement to this very prevalent mistake." Encouragement? He says, in his 'Apology,' and repeats the passage in his rare tract*, "Our *maker* showed great judgment in causing, by enchantment, *the king's ship to be wrecked on the still-vex'd Bermoothes*." Again, "Stephano became king of the still-vex'd Bermoothes." Lastly, in the 'Another Account,'—"If it be asked what circumstance it was which induced our dramatist to think of Bermudas, in 1613, *as the scene of his comedy*, the answer must be that the Bermudas, which had been considered, ever since the publication, in 1596, of Sir Walter Raleigh's description of Guiana, as a 'hellish sea for thunder, lightning, and storms,' was first planted, in 1612, by a ship called the Plough, from the Thames, which carried out a colony of a hundred and sixty persons." The nonsense of this notion is self-evident. If the Bermudas were *the scene*, Ariel must have outdone himself to convey "the rest of the fleet" over the Atlantic, to place them "upon the Mediterranean flote;" and, on the contrary, he would have been a mere human carrier if he had been called up from one "deep nook" of the island "to fetch dew" from some other part. This will not quite fit. And so we must resort to another geographical system. Mr. Hunter has discovered "another island," which he thus introduces:—"I must do the old critics the justice to say that, till this discovery (such I

* 'Another Account of the Incidents,' &c., 1815.

may call it), no island, as far as I know, had a better claim to be regarded as the island of Prospero than Bermuda." That island is Lampedusa. "Did we not know," he continues, "how much still remains to be done in the *criticism* of these plays, it would be scarcely credible that no one seems to have thought of *tracing the line of Alonso's track*, or of speculating, *with the map before him*, on the island on which Prospero and Miranda may be supposed to have been cast." Lampedusa is the island: "It lies midway between Malta and the African coast;"—"in its dimensions Lampedusa is what we may imagine Prospero's island to have been; in circuit thirteen miles and a half;"—it is "situated in a stormy sea;"—it is "a deserted island;" it has the reputation of "being enchanted." Can anything be more decisive? "What I contend for is the absolute claim of Lampedusa to have been the island in the poet's mind when he drew the scenes of this drama." The matter, according to Mr. Hunter, is beyond all doubt. "In the rocks of Lampedusa there are hollows;"—"Caliban is stied in the "hard rock:" in Lampedusa there was a hermit's cell—"this cell is surely the origin of the cell of Prospero:" Caliban's employment was collecting firewood;—"Malta is supplied with firewood from Lampedusa." Mr. Hunter asks his friend "whether you would think me presumptuous in *requiring* that in future editions of these plays there should be, in the accustomed place, at the foot of the dramatis personæ, the words

'SCENE, LAMPEDUSA.'

We have not so determined the scene. We believe that the poet had no locality whatever in his mind, just as he had no notion of any particular storm. Tempests and enchanted islands are of the oldest materials of poetry. Mr. Hunter says Shakspeare had Ariosto's description of a storm in his mind. Who, we may ask, suggested to Ariosto his description? Has any one fixed the *date* of Ariosto's storm? Has not the poet described the poet's office?—

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,

Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,

And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name.'

Franz Horn asks whether Prospero left Caliban to govern the island? We believe the island sunk into the sea, and was no more seen, after Prospero broke his staff and drowned his book.

There is a very curious story told by Warton, of poor Collins informing him, during his mental aberration, that he had seen a romance which contained the story of 'The Tempest.'—

"I was informed by the late Mr. Collins, of Chichester, that Shakspeare's 'Tempest,' for which no origin is yet assigned, was founded on a romance called 'Amelia and Isabella,' printed in Italian, Spanish, French, and English, in 1588. But, though this information has not proved true on examination, a useful conclusion may be drawn from it, that Shakspeare's story is somewhere to be found in an Italian novel; at least, that the story preceded Shakspeare. Mr. Collins had searched this subject with no less fidelity than judgment and industry; but, his memory failing in his last calamitous indisposition, he probably gave me the name of one novel for another. I remember he added a circumstance which may lead to a discovery, that the principal character of the romance answering to Shakspeare's 'Prospero' was a chemical necromancer, who had bound a spirit like Ariel to obey his call and perform his services."

Mr. Thoms, in a very interesting paper on the 'Early English and German Dramas,'* has given, from Tieck, an account of certain early productions of English dramatists which were translated into German about the year 1600. We cannot here enter into the very curious question whether an English company performed English plays in Germany at that period; but it is quite certain that some of our earliest dramas were either translated or adapted for the German stage at this early period. Jacob Ayrrer, a notary of Nürnberg, was the author of thirty

dramas, in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Some are clearly derived from English models; and Mr. Thoms thinks that an old play, on which Shakspeare founded 'The Tempest,' is translated in Ayrrer's works, published in 1618.

"The origin of the plot of 'The Tempest' is for the present a Shakspearean mystery,' are the words of our friend Mr. Hunter, in his learned and interesting dissertation upon that play. That mystery, however, I consider as solved,—Tieck appears to entertain no doubt upon the subject,—and I hope to bring the matter before you in such a manner as will satisfy you of the correctness of Tieck's views in this respect. But to the point. Shakspeare unquestionably derived his idea of 'The Tempest' from an earlier drama, now not known to exist, but of which a German version is preserved in Ayrrer's play, entitled 'Die Schöne Sidea' (The Beautiful Sidea); and the proof of this fact is to be found in the points of resemblance between the two plays, which are far too striking and peculiar to be the result of accident.

"It is true that the scene in which Ayrrer's play is laid, and the names of the personages, differ from those of 'The Tempest;' but the main incidents of the two plays are all but identically the same. For instance, in the German drama, Prince Ludolph and Prince Leudegast supply the places of Prospero and Alonso. Ludolph, like Prospero, is a magician, and like him has an only daughter, Sidea—the Miranda of 'The Tempest'—and an attendant spirit, Runcifal, who, though not strictly resembling either Ariel or Caliban, may well be considered as the primary type which suggested to the nimble fancy of our great dramatist those strongly yet admirably contrasted beings. Shortly after the commencement of the play, Ludolph, having been vanquished by his rival, and with his daughter Sidea driven into a forest, rebukes her for complaining of their change of fortune, and then summons his spirit Runcifal to learn from him their future destiny, and prospects of revenge. Runcifal, who is, like Ariel, somewhat 'moody,' announces to Ludolph that the son of his enemy will shortly become his prisoner. After a comic episode, most probably introduced by the German, we see Prince Leudegast, with his son Engelbrecht—the Ferdinand of 'The Tempest'—and the councillors, hunting in the same forest; when Engelbrecht

* 'New Monthly Magazine,' January 1, 1841.

and his companion Famulus, having separated from their associates, are suddenly encountered by Ludolph and his daughter. He commands them to yield themselves prisoners—they refuse, and try to draw their swords, when, as Prospero tells Ferdinand,

‘I can here disarm thee with this stick,
And make thy weapon drop,’

so Ludolph, with his wand, keeps their swords in their scabbards, paralyses Engelbrecht, and makes him confess his

‘Nerves are in their infancy again,
And have no vigour in them,’

and, when he has done so, gives him over as a slave to Sidea, to carry logs for her.

“The resemblance between this scene and the parallel scene in ‘The Tempest’ is rendered still more striking in a late part of the play, when Sidea, moved by pity for the labours of Engelbrecht, in carrying logs, declares to him,

‘I am your wife, if you will marry me,’

an event which, in the end, is happily brought about, and leads to the reconciliation of their parents, the rival princes.”

It appears not the least extraordinary circumstance in this extraordinary question of literary history, that Ayrrer did not *translate* some of Shakspeare’s own works, particularly those which existed in printed copies. Shakspeare, according to Eschenburg, was not known in Germany, as far as can be collected from any mention in books, till nearly the close of the 17th century.—

“The first German author who has given a thought to Shakspeare is perhaps Morhof, whose ‘Instructions in the German Language’ was first printed in 1682. Towards the end of the fourth chapter, ‘On the Poetry of the English,’ he is merely named, and Morhof acknowledges that he had himself seen nothing of his, or of Beaumont and Fletcher’s. Not very long afterwards, Benthem, our poet, mentions him in his ‘State of the English Schools and Churches,’ in chap. xix., among the leading literary characters of England. But all he says of him, and that perhaps only for the first time in the second edition, is the following, which is droll enough: ‘William Shakspeare was born at Stratford in Warwickshire; his learning was very little, and therefore it is the more a matter of wonder that he should be a very excellent poet. He had an

ingenious and witty mind, full of fun, and was so successful both in tragedy and comedy, that he could move an Heraclitus to laughter, and a Democritus to tears.’ ”*

So much has been written on ‘The Tempest,’ and so unnecessary is it for us to analyse the plot or dwell on the charms of the poetry, that we shall here content ourselves with presenting our readers with some brief extracts, having reference to the principal characters, translated from the ‘Shaksperes Schauspiele erläutert’ of Franz Horn.

“In Prospero we have a delineation of peculiar profundity. He was, once, not altogether a just prince, not thoroughly a just man; but he had the disposition to be both. His soul thirsted after knowledge; his mind, sincere in itself, after love; and his fancy, after the secrets of nature: but he forgot, what a prince should least of all forget, that, upon this moving earth, superior acquirements, in order to stand firmly, must be exercised carefully; that the world is full of enemies who can only be subdued by a watchful power and prudence, and that in certain situations the armour ought never to be put off. Thus it became easy for his nearest relation, his brother, with the help of a powerful neighbouring king who could not resist the offered but unjustifiable advantage, to depose him from his dukedom. But as the pure morals of the prince, although they were perhaps but lazily exercised in behalf of his subjects, had nevertheless acquired their love, and the usurper not daring to make an attack on the lives of the fallen, Prospero saved himself, his daughter, and a part of his magical books, upon a desert island. Here he becomes, what, in its highest sense, he had not yet been, a father and prince. His knowledge extends. Nature listens to him, perhaps because he learned to know and love her more inwardly. Zephyr-like spirits, full of a tender frolicsome humour, and rude earth-born gnomes, are compelled to serve him. The whole island is full of wonders, but only such as the fancy willingly receives, of sounds and songs, of merry helpers and comical tormentors; and

* ‘Johan Joachim Eschenburg, über W. Shakspeare,’ new edit., Zürich, 1806, p. 497.

Prospero shows his great human wisdom particularly in the manner with which he, as the spiritual centre, knows how to conduct his intercourse with friends and foes. First, with his daughter. Miranda is his highest, his one, his all; nevertheless there is visible a certain elevation, a solemnity, in his behaviour towards her,—peculiarities which, even with the deepest love, the severely tried and aged man easily assumes. Indeed, much as the pure sense of his daughter must have long cheered him, he deems it good to relate to her now for the first time the history of his earlier sufferings, when he has mastery over, and the power to punish, his adversaries. That his narration should have the effect of sending Miranda to sleep (at least his repeated inquiries as to whether she attends show that he fears it) has given occasion to many explanations, into the worth or worthlessness of which we shall not here inquire. Perhaps the following idea may give some light:—The wonderful acts occasionally like the music upon Jessica in the fifth act of ‘The Merchant of Venice:’ the external miracles of Nature scarcely affect Miranda upon an island where Nature herself has become a wonder, and the wonders become Nature. But for her, even on that account, there are only so many greater wonders in the heart and life of man. She has certainly seen untamed wildness and perverseness in Caliban; but he appears to her not as a man, but only as a foolish swearing monster, whom she does not fear, because he is the bond-slave of her powerful father, in whose quiet wisdom she continually confides. But the checkered course of the world, its wild passions, are to her wholly strange; and the relation of such wonders might well affect her in the manner her father fears.”

“Caliban, who, in spite of his imperfect, brutish, and half-human nature, as the son of a witch, is something marvellously exciting, and as pretender to the sovereignty of the island something ridiculously sublime, has been considered by every one as an inimitable character of the most powerful poetic fancy; and, the more the character is investigated, the more is our attention re-

warded. He is the son of a witch, Sycorax, who, though long since dead, continues to work even from the grave. * * * * In Caliban there is a curious mixture of devil, man, and beast, descending even to the fish species. He desires evil, not for the sake of evil or from mere wickedness, but because it is *piquant*, and because he feels himself oppressed. He is convinced that gross injustice has been done him, and thus he does not rightly feel that what he desires may be wicked. He knows perfectly well how powerful Prospero is, whose art may perhaps even subdue his maternal god Setebos, and that he himself is unfortunately nothing but a slave. Nevertheless, he cannot cease to curse, and certainly with the gusto of a virtuoso in this more than liberal art. Whatever he can find most base and disgusting he surrounds almost artistically with the most inharmonious murmuring and hissing words, and then wishes them to fall upon Prospero and his lovely daughter. He knows very well that all this will help him nothing, but that at night he will have ‘cramps,’ and ‘side-stitches,’ and be ‘pinched by urchins,’ but still he continues to pour out new curses. He has acquired one fixed idea—that the island belonged to his mother, and, consequently, now to himself, the crown prince. The greatest horrors are pleasant to him, for he feels them only as jests which break the monotony of his slavery. He laments that he had been prevented from completing a frightful sin,—‘would it had been done,’ &c.; and the thought of a murder gives him a real enjoyment, perhaps chiefly on account of the noise and confusion that it would produce.

“Recognising all this, yet our feelings towards him never rise to a thorough hatred. We find him only laughably horrible, and as a marvellous though at bottom a feeble monster highly interesting, for we foresee from the first that none of his threats will be fulfilled. Caliban could scarcely at any time have been made out more in detail, but we are well enabled to seize upon the idea of his inner physiognomy from the naked sketch of his external form. He is, with all his foolish rage and wickedness, not entirely

vulgar ; and though he allows himself to be imposed upon, even by his miserable comrades, (perhaps only because they are men, and, if ugly, yet handsomer than himself,) he everywhere shows more prudence, which is only checked because he considers himself more powerful than he really is. Indeed, he stands far higher than Trinculo and Stephano."

"Opposed to him stands Ariel, by no means an ethereal, featureless angel, but as a real airy and frolicsome spirit, agreeable and open, but also capricious, roguish, and, with his other qualities, somewhat mischievous. He is thankful to Prospero for his release from the most confined of all confined situations, but his gratitude is not a natural virtue (we might almost add not an airy virtue); therefore he must (like man) be sometimes reminded of his debt, and held in check. Only the promise of his freedom in two days restores him again to his amiability, and he then finds pleasure in executing the plans of his master with a delightful activity.

"We noticed in passing 'the featureless angel,' and it requires no further indication where to find such beings; for no one will deny that these immortal winged children (so charming in many old German pictures), with their somewhat dull immortal harps, and, if possible, their still more dull and immortal anthems, cause a not less immortal tediousness in the works of many poets. Shakspeare did not fall into this error, and it is in the highest degree attractive to observe the various and safe modes in which he manages the marvellous. In the storm he achieves his object by the simplest means, while, as has been already indicated, he represents Nature herself, and certainly justly, as the greatest miracle. When he

has once in his own gentle way led us to believe that Prospero, through his high art, is able to overrule Nature—and how willingly do we believe in these higher powers of man!—how completely natural and, to a certain degree, what merely pleasant trifles, are all the wonders which we see playing around us! These higher powers, also, are not confined to Prospero alone; Ferdinand and Miranda have, without any enchanted wand or any prolix instruction, full superiority over the wonders of Nature, and they allow them to pass around them merely as a delightful drama; for the highest wonder is in their own breasts—love, the pure human, and even on that account holy, love.

"Even the pure mind and the firm heart, as they are shown in old Gonzalo, are armed with an almost similar power. With our poet, a truly moral man is always amiable, powerful, agreeable, and quietly wards off the snares laid for him. This old Gonzalo is so entirely occupied with his duty, in which alone he finds his pleasure, that he scarcely notices the gnat-stings of wit with which his opponents persecute him; or, if he observes, easily and firmly repels them. What wit indeed has he to fear, who, in a sinking ship, has power remaining to sustain himself and others with genuine humour? Shakspeare seems scarcely to recognise a powerless virtue, and he depicts it only in cases of need; so everything closes satisfactorily. The pure poetry of nature and genius inspires us; and when we hear Prospero recite his far too modest epilogue, after laying down his enchanted wand, we have no wish to turn our minds to any frivolous thoughts, for the magic we have experienced was too charming and too mighty not to be enduring."

CHAPTER IV.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

THE original quarto edition of 'Troilus and Cressida,' printed in 1609, bears the following title:—'The famous Historie of Troylus and Cresseid. Excellently expressing the Beginning of their Loues, with the Conceited Wooing of Pandarus Prince of Licia. Written by William Shakespeare. London, Imprinted by G. Eld, for R. Bonian and H. Walley, and are to be sold at the Spred Eagle in Paules Churchyard, ouer against the great North Doore, 1609.' In the same year a second edition was put forth by the same publishers, in the title-page of which appears, "As it was acted by the King's Majesty's Servants at the Globe." No other edition of the play was published until it appeared in the folio collection of 1623.

The first quarto edition of 1609 contains the following very extraordinary preface:—

"A never writer to an ever reader.

"News.

"Eternal reader, you have here a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar, and yet passing full of the palm comical; for it is a birth of your brain, that never undertook anything comical vainly; and were but the vain names of comedies changed for the titles of commodities, or of plays for pleas, you should see all those grand censors, that now style them such vanities, flock to them for the main grace of their gravities; especially this author's comedies, that are so framed to the life, that they serve for the most common commentaries of all the actions of our lives, showing such a dexterity and power of wit, that the most displeased with plays are pleased with his comedies. And all such dull and heavy-witted worldlings as were never capable of the wit of a comedy, coming by report of them to his representations, have found that wit there that they never found in themselves, and have parted better witted than they came; feeling an edge of wit set upon them more than ever they dreamed they had brain to grind it on. So much and such favoured salt of wit is in his comedies, that they seem (for

their height of pleasure) to be born in that sea that brought forth Venus. Amongst all there is none more witty than this: and had I time I would comment upon it, though I know it needs not (for so much as will make you think your testern well bestowed), but for so much worth as even poor I know to be stuffed in it. It deserves such a labour, as well as the best comedy in Terence or Plautus. And believe this, that when he is gone, and his comedies out of sale, you will scramble for them, and set up a new English Inquisition. Take this for a warning, and at the peril of your pleasures' loss and judgments, refuse not, nor like this the less for not being sullied with the smoky breath of the multitude; but thank fortune for the scape it hath made amongst you, since by the grand possessors' wills I believe you should have prayed for them rather than been prayed. And so I leave all such to be prayed for (for the states of their wit's healths) that will not praise it. Vale."

In 1609, then, the reader is told, "You have here a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar;" and he is further exhorted—"refuse not, nor like this the less for not being sullied with the smoky breath of the multitude." The reader is also invited to spend a sixpence upon this play:—"Had I time I would comment upon it, though I know it needs not, for so much as will make you think your *testern* well bestowed." Never was one of Shakspeare's plays set forth during his life with such commendation as here abounds. His Comedies "are so framed to the life, that they serve for the most common commentaries of all the actions of our lives." The passage towards the conclusion is the most remarkable:—"Thank Fortune for the scape it hath made amongst you, since by the grand possessors' wills I believe you should have prayed for them rather than been prayed." We have here, then, first, a most distinct assertion that, in 1609, 'Troilus and Cressida' was a new play, never staled

with the stage. This, one might think, would be decisive as to the chronology of this play; but in the Stationers' books is the following entry:—"Feb. 7, 1602. Mr. Roberts. The booke of Troilus and Cresseda, as yt is acted by my Lo. Chamberlen's men." Malone assumes that the 'Troilus and Cressida' thus acted by the Lord Chamberlain's men (the players at the Globe during the reign of Elizabeth) was the same as that published in 1609. Yet there were other authors at work upon the subject besides Shakspeare. In Henslowe's manuscripts there are several entries of monies lent, in 1599, to Dekker and Chettle, in earnest of a book called 'Troilus and Cressida.' This play, thus bargained for by Henslowe, appears to have been subsequently called 'Agamemnon.' The probability is, that the rival company at the Globe had, about the same period, brought out their own 'Troilus and Cressida;' and that this is the play referred to in the entry by Roberts in 1602; for if that entry had applied to the 'Troilus and Cressida' of Shakspeare, first published in 1609, how are we to account for the subsequent entry in the same registers made previously to the publication of that edition? Altogether the evidence of the date of the play, derived from the entry of 1602, appears to us worth very little.

And here arises the question, whether the expressions in the preface "never staled with the stage"—"never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar,"—"not sullied with the smoky breath of the multitude," mean that the play had not been acted at all, or that it had not been acted on the public stage. There is a good deal of probability in the conjecture of Tieck upon this subject:—"In the palace of some great personage, for whom it was probably expressly written, it was first represented; according to my belief for the King himself, who, weak as he was, contemptible as he sometimes showed himself, and pedantic as his wisdom and short-sighted as his politics were, yet must have had a certain fine sense of poetry, wit, and talent, beyond what his historians have ascribed to him. But whether the King, or some one else of whom we have not received

the name, it is sufficient to know that for this person, and not for the public, Shakspeare wrote this wonderful comedy." The proprietors of the Globe Theatre were clearly hostile to the publication of Shakspeare's later plays; and, in fact, with the exception of 'Lear,' and 'Troilus and Cressida,' no play was published between 1603 and Shakspeare's death. Now, in the title-page of the original 'Lear,' published in 1608, there is the following minute particularity:—"As it was played before the King's Majesty at Whitehall upon St. Stephen's night in Christmas holidays, by his Majesty's Servants playing usually at the Globe, on the Bank's side." From this statement it appears to us highly probable that, in the instances both of 'Lear' and 'Troilus and Cressida,' the plays were performed, for the first time, before the King; that the copies so used were out of the control of the players who represented these dramas; and that some one, authorized or not, printed each play from the copy used on these occasions. Let us look again at the passage in the preface to 'Troilus and Cressida' under this impression:—"Thank Fortune for the scape it hath made amongst you, since by the grand possessors' wills I believe you should have prayed for them rather than been prayed." There is an obscurity in this passage. "I believe you should have prayed for them rather than been prayed" is quite unintelligible, if "the grand possessors" had been the proprietors of the Globe Theatre. But suppose the grand possessors to be, as Tieck has conjectured, some great personage, probably the King himself, for whom the play was expressly written, and a great deal of the obscurity of the preface vanishes. By the grand possessors' wills you should have prayed for them (as subjects publicly pray for their rulers) rather than been prayed (as you are by players who solicit your indulgence in prologues and epilogues).

"The original story," says Dryden, "was written by one Lollius, a Lombard, in Latin verse, and translated by Chaucer into English; intended, I suppose, as a satire on the inconstancy of women. I find nothing

of it among the ancients, not so much as the name Cressida once mentioned. Shakspeare (as I hinted), *in the apprenticeship of his writing*, modelled it into that play which is now called by the name of 'Troilus and Cressida.' Chaucer himself speaks of "Myne Auctor Lollius;" and in his address to the Muse, in the beginning of the second book, he says,—

"To every lover I me excuse
That of no sentiment I this endite,
But out of Latin in my tongue it write."

Without entering into the question who Lollius was, or believing more than that "Lollius, if a writer of that name existed at all, was a somewhat somewhere,"* we at once receive the 'Troilus and Creseide' of Chaucer as the foundation of Shakspeare's play. Of his perfect acquaintance with that poem there can be no doubt. Chaucer, of all English writers, was the one who would have the greatest charm for Shakspeare. 'The Rape of Lucrece' is written precisely in the same versification as Chaucer's 'Troilus and Creseide.' When Lorenzo, in 'The Merchant of Venice,' exclaims,—

"In such a night,
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,
And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night,"—

we may be sure that Shakspeare had in his mind the following passages of Chaucer:—

"Upon the wallés fast eke would he walk,
And on the Greeké's host he would ysee,
And to himself right thus he would ytalk:
'Lo! yonder is mine owné lady free,
Or ellés yonder there the tentés be,
And thence cometh this air that is so sote,
That in my soul I feel it doth me bote.'

* * * * *

The day go'th fast, and after that came eve,
And yet came not to Troilus Creseid:
He looketh forth by hedge, by tree, by grove,
And far his head over the wall he laid."

Mr. Godwin has justly observed that the Shakspearean commentators have done injustice to Chaucer in not more distinctly associating his poem with this remarkable play:—

"It would be extremely unjust to quit the

consideration of Chaucer's poem of 'Troilus and Creseide' without noticing the high honour it has received in having been made the foundation of one of the plays of Shakspeare. There seems to have been in this respect a sort of conspiracy in the commentators upon Shakspeare against the glory of our old English bard. In what they have written concerning this play, they make a very slight mention of Chaucer; they have not consulted his poem for the purpose of illustrating this admirable drama; and they have agreed, as far as possible, to transfer to another author the honour of having supplied materials to the tragic artist. Dr. Johnson says, 'Shakspeare has in his story followed, for the greater part, the old book of Caxton, which was then very popular; but the character of Thersites, of which it makes no mention, is a proof that this play was written after Chapman had published his version of Homer.' Mr. Steevens asserts that 'Shakspeare received the greatest part of his materials for the structure of this play from the Troye Boke of Lydgate.' And Mr. Malone repeatedly treats the 'History of the Destruction of Troy, translated by Caxton,' as 'Shakspeare's authority' in the composition of this drama. . . . The fact is, that the play of Shakspeare we are here considering has for its main foundation the poem of Chaucer, and is indebted for many accessory helps to the books mentioned by the commentators. . . .

"We are not, however, left to probability and conjecture as to the use made by Shakspeare of the poem of Chaucer. His other sources were Chapman's translation of Homer, the 'Troye Boke' of Lydgate, and Caxton's 'History of the Destruction of Troy.' It is well known that there is no trace of the particular story of 'Troilus and Creseide' among the ancients. It occurs, indeed, in Lydgate and Caxton; but the name and actions of Pandarus, a very essential personage in the tale as related by Shakspeare and Chaucer, are entirely wanting, except a single mention of him by Lydgate, and that with an express reference to Chaucer as his authority. Shakspeare has taken the story of Chaucer with all its imperfections

* Coleridge's 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 130.

and defects, and has copied the series of its incidents with his customary fidelity; an exactness seldom to be found in any other dramatic writer.*

Although the main incidents in the adventures of the Greek lover and his faithless mistress are followed with little deviation, yet, independent of the wonderful difference in the characterization, the whole story under the treatment of Shakspeare becomes thoroughly original. In no play does he appear to us to have a more complete mastery over his materials, or to mould them into more plastic shapes by the force of his most surpassing imagination. The great Homeric poem, the rude romance of the destruction of Troy, the beautiful elaboration of that romance by Chaucer, are all subjected to his wondrous alchemy; and new forms and combinations are called forth so lifelike, that all the representations which have preceded them look cold and rigid statues, not warm and breathing men and women. Coleridge's theory of the principle upon which this was effected is, we have no doubt, essentially true:—

"I am half inclined to believe that Shakspeare's main object (or shall I rather say his ruling impulse?) was to translate the poetic heroes of Paganism into the not less rude, but more intellectually vigorous, and more *featurely*, warriors of Christian chivalry, and to substantiate the distinct and graceful profiles or outlines of the Homeric epic into the flesh and blood of the romantic drama,—in short, to give a grand history-piece in the robust style of Albert Durer."†

To Dryden's alteration of 'Troilus and Cressida' was prefixed a prologue, "spoken by Mr. Betterton, representing the Ghost of Shakspeare." The Ghost appears to have entirely forgotten what he was on earth, and to present a marvellous resemblance, in his mind at least, to Mr. John Dryden. He says,

"In this my *rough-drawn* play you shall behold
Some master-strokes."

Dryden, in his elaborate 'Preface to Troilus and Cressida, containing the grounds of

Criticism in Tragedy,' thus speaks of Shakspeare's performance:—

"For the play itself, the author seems to have begun it with some fire; the characters of Pandarus and Thersites are promising enough; but, as if he grew weary of his task, after an entrance or two he lets them fall; and the latter part of the tragedy is nothing but a confusion of drums and trumpets, excursions and alarms. The chief persons who give name to the tragedy are left alive: Cressida is false, and is not punished. Yet, after all, because the play was Shakspeare's, and that there appeared in *some places* of it the admirable genius of the author, *I undertook to remove that heap of rubbish under which many excellent thoughts lay wholly buried.*" The mode in which Dryden got rid of the rubbish, and built up his own edifice, is very characteristic of the age and of the man:—

"I new modelled the plot; threw out many unnecessary persons; improved those characters which were *begun and left unfinished*,—as Hector, Troilus, Pandarus, and Thersites; and added that of Andromache. After this I made, with no small trouble, an order and connection of all the scenes, removing them from the places where they were inartificially set."

The result of all this is, that the Ghost of Shakspeare, in the concluding lines of the Prologue, thus enlightens the audience as to the dominant idea of the 'Troilus and Cressida':—

"My faithful scene from true records shall tell
How Trojan valour did the Greek excel;
Your great forefathers shall their fame regain,
And Homer's angry ghost repine in vain."

Coleridge says, "there is no one of Shakspeare's plays harder to characterize." He has overlooked the circumstance that, when the "rubbish" was removed, it became a true record, a faithful chronicle, of the heroic actions of the Trojans,—our "great forefathers." With every admiration for "glorious John" in his own proper line, we must endeavour to understand what Shakspeare's 'Troilus and Cressida' is, by comparing it with what it is *not* in the alteration before us.

* 'Life of Chaucer,' vol. i. (4to) p. 315.

† 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 183.

The notion of Dryden was to convert the 'Troilus and Cressida' into a regular tragedy. He complains, we have seen, that "the chief persons who give name to the tragedy are left alive: Cressida is false and is not punished." The excitement of pity and terror, we are told, is the only ground of tragedy. Tragedy, too, must have "a moral that directs the whole action of the play to one centre." To this standard, then, is Shakspeare's 'Troilus and Cressida' to be reduced. The chief persons who give name to the tragedy are *not* to be left alive. Cressida is *not* to be false; but she is to die: and so terror and pity are to be produced. And now comes the moral:—

"Then, since from home-bred factions ruin
springs,

Let subjects learn obedience to their kings."

The management by which Dryden has accomplished this metamorphosis is one of the most remarkable examples of perverted ingenuity. He had a licentious age to please. He could not spare a line, or a word, of what may be considered the objectionable scenes between Pandarus, Troilus, and Cressida. They formed no part of the "rubbish" he desired to remove. He has heightened them wherever possible; and what in Shakspeare was a sly allusion becomes with him a positive grossness. Now let us consider for a moment what Shakspeare intended by these scenes. Cressida is the exception to Shakspeare's general idea of the female character. She is beautiful, witty, accomplished, but she is impure. In her, love is not a sentiment, or a passion,—it is an impulse. Temperament is stronger than will. Her love has nothing ideal, spiritual, in its composition. It is not constant, because it is not discriminate. Setting apart her inconstancy, how altogether different is Cressida from Juliet, or Viola, or Helena, or Perdita! There is nothing in her which could be called love; no depth, no concentration of feeling,—nothing that can bear the name of *devotion*. Shakspeare would not permit a mistake to be made on the subject; and he has therefore given to Ulysses to describe her, as *he* conceived her. Considering what his intentions were, and what really

is the high morality of the characterization, we can scarcely say that he has made the representation too prominent. When he drew Cressida, we think he had the feeling strong on his mind which gave birth to the 129th Sonnet. A French writer, in a notice of this play, says, "Les deux amants se voient, s'entendent, et sont *heureux*." Shakspeare has described such happiness:—

"A bliss in proof,—and proved, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream:
All this the world well knows; yet none
knows well
To shun the heaven that leads men to this
hell."

It was this morality that Shakspeare meant to teach when he painted this one exception to the general purity of his female characters. He did not, like the dramatists of the age of the Restoration, make purity the exception: his estimate of women was formed upon a truer standard. But when Dryden undertook to remodel Shakspeare, female morality, like every other morality, was merely conventional: virtue was an affair of expediency, and not of principle. With an entire submission, then, to the genius of his age, does Dryden retain and heighten the scenes between Troilus and Cressida until she quits the Trojan camp. But in all this, as we are to see in the sequel, Cressida is a perfectly correct and amiable personage. We are told, indeed, of her frank reception of the welcome of the Grecian chiefs; but there is no Ulysses to pronounce a judgment upon her character. She admits, indeed, the suit of Diomedes, and she gives him pledges of her affection; but this is all a make-believe, for, like a dutiful child, she is following the advice of her father:—

"You must dissemble love to Diomede still:
False Diomede, bred in Ulysses' school,
Can never be deceived
But by strong arts and blandishments of love.
Put 'em in practice all; seem lost and won,
And draw him on, and give him line again."

Upon this very solid foundation, then, are built up the terror and pity of Dryden's tragedy: and so Troilus, who has witnessed Cressida's endearments to Diomedes, refuses

to believe that she is faithful; and then Cressida kills herself; and Troilus kills Diomedes; and Achilles kills Troilus; and all the Trojans are killed: and the Greeks who remain upon the field are very happy; and Ulysses tells us,—

“Now peaceful Order has resumed the reins,
Old Time looks young, and Nature seems
renew'd.”

Here is a tragedy for you, which “is an imitation of one entire, great, and probable action, not told, but represented; which, by moving us to fear and pity, is conducive to the purging of those two passions in our minds.” So Dryden quotes Aristotle; and so, not understanding Aristotle, he takes upon himself to mend Shakspeare, (“incomparable,” as he calls him,) according to the notions of “my friend Mr. Rymer,” and of “Bossu, the best of modern critics.”

The feeling which the *study* of Shakspeare's ‘Troilus and Cressida’ slowly but certainly calls forth is that of almost prostration before the marvellous intellect which has produced it. But this is the result of study, as we have said. The play cannot be understood upon a superficial reading: it is full of the most subtle art. We may set aside particular passages, and admire their surpassing eloquence,—their profound wisdom; but it is long before the play, as a whole, obtains its proper mastery over the understanding. It is very difficult to define what is the great charm and wonder of its entirety. To us it appears as if the poet, without the slightest particle of presumption, had proposed to himself to look down upon the Homeric heroes from an Olympus of his own. He opens the ‘Iliad,’ and there he reads of “Achilles’ baneful wrath.” A little onward he is told of the “high threatening” of “the great cloud-gatherer.” The gods of Homer are made up of human passions. But *he* appears throned upon an eminence, from which he can not only command a perfect view of the game which men play, but, seeing all, become a partisan of none,—perfectly cognizant of all motives, but himself motiveless. And yet the whole representation is true, and it is therefore

genial. He does not stand above men by lowering men. Social life is not made worse than it is, that he who describes it may appear above its ordinary standard. It is not a *travestie* of Homer or of Nature. The heroic is not lowered by association with the ridiculous. Shakspeare's heroes of the ‘Iliad’ show us very little of the vulgar side of human life,—not much even of the familiar; but the result is, that they cease to be heroic. How this is attained is the wonder. It is something to have got rid of the machinery of the gods,—something to have a Thersites eternally despising and despised. But this is not all. The whole tendency of the play,—its incidents, its characterization,—is to lower what the Germans call herodom. Ulrici maintains that “the far-sighted Shakspeare most certainly did not mistake as to the beneficial effect which a nearer intimacy with the high culture of antiquity had produced, and would produce, upon the Christian European mind. But he saw the danger of an indiscriminate admiration of this classical antiquity; for he who thus accepted it must necessarily fall to the very lowest station in religion and morality:—as, indeed, if we closely observe the character of the eighteenth century, we see has happened. Out of this prophetic spirit, which penetrated with equal clearness through the darkness of coming centuries and the clouds of a far-distant past, Shakspeare wrote this deeply significant satire upon the Homeric herodom. He had no desire to debase the elevated, to deteriorate or make little the great, and still less to attack the poetical worth of Homer, or of heroic poetry in general. But he wished to warn thoroughly against the over-valuation and idolatry of them, to which man so willingly abandons himself. He endeavoured, at the same time, to bring strikingly to view the universal truth, that everything that is merely human, even when it is glorified with the nimbus of a poetic ideality and a mythical past, yet, seen in the bird's-eye perspective of a pure moral ideality, appears very small.” All this may seem as super-refinement, in which the critic pretends to see farther than the poet ever saw. But to such an objection

there is a very plain answer. A certain result is produced:—is the result correctly described? If it be so, is that result an effect of principle or an effect of chance? As a proof that it was the effect of principle, we may say that Dryden did not see the principle; and that, not seeing it, he entirely changed the character of the play as a work of art. For example, there is no scene in the drama so entirely in accordance with the principle as that in which Ulysses stirs up the slothful and dogged Achilles into a rivalry with Ajax. It is altogether so Shakspearean in its profundity,—it presents such a key to the whole Shakspearean conduct of this wonderful drama,—that we cannot be content merely to refer to it.

Ulyss. Now, great Thetis' son!

Achil. What are you reading?

Ulyss. A strange fellow here
Writes me, That man, how dearly ever parted,
How much in having, or without, or in,
Cannot make boast to have that which he
hath,

Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection;
As when his virtues shining upon others
Heat them, and they retort that heat again
To the first giver.

Achil. This is not strange, Ulysses.
The beauty that is born here in the face
The bearer knows not, but commends itself
To others' eyes: nor doth the eye itself
(That most pure spirit of sense) behold itself,
Not going from itself; but eye to eye op-
posed

Salutes each other with each other's form.
For speculation turns not to itself,
Till it hath travell'd, and is married there
Where it may see itself: this is not strange
at all.

Ulyss. I do not strain at the position,
It is familiar; but at the author's drift:
Who, in his circumstance, expressly proves,
That no man is the lord of anything
(Though in and of him there is much con-
sisting),

Till he communicate his parts to others:
Nor doth he of himself know them for aught
Till he behold them form'd in the applause
Where they are extended; which, like an arch,
reverberates

The voice again; or like a gate of steel,

Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
His figure and his heat. I was much rapt in
this,

And apprehended here immediately
The unknown Ajax.

Heavens, what a man is there! a very horse;
That has he knows not what. Nature, what
things there are,

Most abject in regard, and dear in use!

What things again most dear in the esteem,
And poor in worth! Now shall we see to-
morrow

An act that very chance doth throw upon him,
Ajax renown'd. O heavens, what some men do,
While some men leave to do!

How some men creep in skittish fortune's
hall,

Whiles others play the idiots in her eyes!

How one man eats into another's pride,

While pride is feasting in his wantonness!

To see these Grecian lords!—why, even al-
ready

They clap the lubber Ajax on the shoulder,
As if his foot were on brave Hector's breast,
And great Troy shrinking.

Achil. I do believe it; for they pass'd by me
As misers do by beggars; neither gave to me
Good word, nor look: What, are my deeds
forgot?

Ulyss. Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his
back,

Wherein he puts alms for oblivion,

A great-sized monster of ingratitude:

Those scraps are good deeds past; which are
devour'd

As fast as they are made, forgot as soon

As done: Perseverance, dear my lord,

Keeps honour bright: To have done, is to
hang

Quite out of fashion, like a rusty mail

In monumental mockery. Take the instant
way;

For honour travels in a strait so narrow,

Where one but goes abreast: keep then the
path;

For emulation hath a thousand sons,

That one by one pursue: If you give way,

Or hedge aside from the direct forthright,

Like to an enter'd tide, they all rush by,

And leave you hindmost;—

Or, like a gallant horse fallen in first rank,

Lie there for pavement to the abject rear,

O'errun and trampled on: Then what they do
in present,

Though less than yours in past, must o'ertop
yours:
For time is like a fashionable host,
That slightly shakes his parting guest by the
hand;
And with his arms outstretch'd, as he would
fly,
Grasps-in the comer: Welcome ever smiles,
And farewell goes out sighing. Oh, let not
virtue seek
Remuneration for the thing it was;
For beauty, wit,
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating time.
One touch of nature makes the whole world
kin,—
That all, with one consent, praise new-born
gawds,
Though they are made and moulded of things
past;
And give to dust, that is a little gilt,
More laud than gilt o'er-dusted.
The present eye praises the present object:
Then marvel not, thou great and complete
man,
That all the Greeks begin to worship Ajax;
Since things in motion sooner catch the eye,
Than what not stirs. The cry went once on
thee,
And still it might; and yet it may again,
If thou wouldst not entomb thyself alive,
And case thy reputation in thy tent;
Whose glorious deeds, but in these fields of
late,
Made emulous missions 'mongst the gods
themselves,
And drave great Mars to faction.

Now, of this scene Dryden has not a word. This was a part of the "rubbish" which he discarded. But in the place of it he gives us an entirely new scene between Hector and Troilus—"almost half the act." He says, "the occasion of raising it was hinted to me by Mr. Betterton; the contrivance and working of it was my own." The scene, he admits, was an imitation of the famous scene in 'Julius Cæsar' between Brutus and Cassius. And so Dryden transposes the principle of one play into another; destroys the grave irony of 'Troilus and Cressida' by the introduction of the heroic seriousness

which was in its place in 'Julius Cæsar;' and gives us, altogether, a set of mongrel characters, compounded of the common-place heroic and Shakspeare's reduction of the false heroic to truth and reason. And yet, with all his labour, Dryden could not make the thing consistent. He is compelled to take Shakspeare's representation of Ajax, for example. One parallel passage will be sufficient to show how Dryden and Shakspeare managed these things:—

DRYDEN.

"Thank Heav'n, my lord, you 're of a gentle nature,
Praise him that got you, her that brought you forth;
But he who taught you first the use of arms,
Let Mars divide eternity in two,
And give him half. I will not praise your wisdom,
Nestor shall do 't; but pardon, father Nestor,
Were you as green as Ajax, and your brain
Temper'd like his, you never should excel him,
But be as Ajax is."

SHAKSPERE.

"*Ulyss.* Thank the heavens, lord, thou art of sweet composure;
Praise him that got thee, she that gave thee suck:
Famed be thy tutor, and thy parts of nature
Thrice-famed, beyond all erudition:
But he that disciplined thy arms to fight,
Let Mars divide eternity in twain,
And give him half: and, for thy vigour,
Bull-bearing Milo his addition yield
To sinewy Ajax. I will not praise thy wisdom,
Which, like a bourn, a pale, a shore, confines
Thy spacious and dilated parts: Here's Nestor,—
Instructed by the antiquary times,
He must, he is, he cannot but be wise;—
But pardon, father Nestor, were your days
As green as Ajax, and your brain so temper'd,
You should not have the eminence of him,
But be as Ajax."

One of the most extraordinary subtleties of Shakspeare's 'Troilus and Cressida' arises out of the circumstance that the real heroic tragedy is found side by side with the ironical heroic. Cassandra, short as the

character is, may be classed among the finest creations of art. Dryden omits Cassandra altogether. Was this a want of a real perception of "the grounds" of tragedy; or an instinct which avoided the higher heroic, when it would come into contrast with his

own feebler conceptions? The Cassandra of Shakspeare is introduced to heighten the effect of the petty passions, the worldliness, which are everywhere around her. The solemn and the earnest are in alliance with madness.

CHAPTER V.

KING HENRY VIII.

'THE famous History of the Life of King Henry the Eighth' was first published in the folio collection of Shakspeare's works in 1623. The date of the original production of this drama has been a subject of much discussion. The opinions in favour of its having been produced in the reign of Elizabeth are far more numerous than those which hold it to be a later production. As the question is one of more than usual interest, we shall examine it somewhat in detail.

And first, of the external evidence. The Globe, Shakspeare's theatre, was burnt down in June, 1613. The cause of this accident, and the circumstances attending it, are minutely related by several witnesses. In Winwood's 'Memorials' there is a letter from John Chamberlain to Sir Ralph Winwood, dated from London the 12th of July, 1613, which describes the burning,— "which fell out by a peal of chambers." This conflagration took place on the previous 29th of June. The play acted on this occasion was one on the story of 'Henry VIII.' Were the "chambers" (small cannon) which produced the misfortune those fired according to the original stage-direction in the fourth scene of the first act of Shakspeare's 'King Henry VIII.,' "*Drum and trumpet, chambers discharged?*" In the Harleian Manuscripts there is a letter from Thomas Lorkin to Sir Thomas Puckering, dated "this last of June, 1613," in which the writer says, "No longer since than yesterday, while Bourbage his company were acting at the Globe the play of '*Henry VIII.*,' and there shooting of cer-

tain chambers in way of triumph, the fire catch'd." But this does not establish that it was Shakspeare's play. The accomplished Sir Henry Wotton, writing to his nephew on the 6th of July, 1613, gives a minute and graphic account of the accident at the Globe:—"Now to let matters of state sleep, I will entertain you at the present with what happened this week at the Bankside. The king's players had a *new play*, called '*All is True*,' representing *some principal pieces of the reign of Henry the Eighth*, which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of pomp and majesty, even to the matting of the stage; the knights of the order, with their Georges and Garter, the guards with their embroidered coats, and the like; sufficient, in truth, within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now King Henry, making a mask at the Cardinal Wolsey's house, and certain cannons being shot off at his entry, some of the paper, or other stuff, wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where, being thought at first but an idle smoke, and their eyes being more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly, and run round like a train, consuming, within less than an hour, the whole house to the very ground. This was the fatal period of that virtuous fabric, wherein yet nothing did perish but wood and straw, and a few forsaken cloaks: only one man had his breeches set on fire, that would perhaps have broiled him, if he had not, by the benefit of a provident wit, put it out with bottle ale."* Here, then, is a *new play* described "repre-

* 'Reliquiæ Wottonianæ.'

senting some principal pieces of the reign of Henry VIII.;" and further, the passage of Shakspeare's play in which the "chambers" are discharged, being the "entry" of the king to the "mask at the cardinal's house," is the same to the letter. But the title which Sir Henry Wotton gives the *new play* is '*All is True*.' Gifford thinks this sufficient to show that the play represented at the Globe in June, 1613, was not Shakspeare's. But other persons call the play so represented 'Henry VIII.' Howes, in his continuation of Stow's 'Chronicle,' so calls it. He writes some time after the destruction of the Globe, for he adds to his account of the fire, "And the next spring it was new builded in far fairer manner than before." He speaks of the title of the play as a familiar thing:—"the house being filled with people to behold the play, viz. of 'Henry the Eighth.'" When Howes wrote, was the title '*All is True*' merged in the more obvious title derived from the subject of the play, and following the character of the titles of Shakspeare's other historical plays? There can be no difficulty in showing that the Prologue to 'Henry VIII.' especially keeps in view such a title as Sir Henry Wotton has mentioned:—

"Such as give
Their money out of hope they may believe,
May here find *truth* too."
"Gentle hearers, know,
To rank our chosen *truth* with such a show
As foot and fight is," &c.
"To make that only *true* we now intend."

Boswell has a very ingenious theory that this Prologue had especial reference to another play on the same historical subject, 'When You See Me You Know Me, or the Famous Chronicle History of King Henry the Eighth, &c., by Samuel Rowley,' in which "the incidents in Henry's reign are thrown together in the most confused manner." But, upon the whole, the probability is that the 'Henry VIII.' of Shakspeare, and the '*All is True*' described by Wotton, are one and the same play. The next question is, then, whether Wotton was correct in describing the 'Henry VIII.' as a *new play*. Chalmers, who almost stands alone in his

opinion, maintains that the *fact* of a play on the subject of Henry VIII. being termed *new* in 1613 is decisive as to the date of its original production at that time. Malone, on the contrary, conjectures that the 'Henry VIII.' was written in 1601, and *revived* in 1613, with a new title and prologue, "having lain by some years unacted." This conjecture rests upon no external evidence. We proceed, therefore, to the other division of the subject—the evidence of its date which is furnished by the play itself.

In the prophecy of Cranmer in the last scene, the glories of the reign of Elizabeth are carried on to that of her successor, in the following lines:—

"Nor shall this peace sleep with her: But as
when
The bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix,
Her ashes new create another heir,
As great in admiration as herself;
So shall she leave her blessedness to one,
(When Heaven shall call her from this cloud
of darkness,)
Who, from the sacred ashes of her honour,
Shall star-like rise, as great in fame as she was,
And so stand fix'd: Peace, plenty, love, truth,
terror,
That were the servants to this chosen infant,
Shall then be his, and like a vine grow to him;
Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
His honour, and the greatness of his name,
Shall be, and make new nations: He shall
flourish,
And, like a mountain cedar, reach his branches
To all the plains about him:—Our children's
children
Shall see this, and bless Heaven."

This passage would appear to be decisive as to the date of the play, by the introduction of these lines:—

"Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
His honour, and the greatness of his name,
Shall be, and make new nations."

That the colonization of *Virginia* is here distinctly alluded to is without doubt. The first charter was granted in 1606; the colony was planted in 1607, in which year *James Town* was built; another charter was given to the colonists in 1612, and a lottery

was also then granted for the encouragement of the colony, which was struggling with great difficulties. That James took an especial interest in this important settlement, and naturally enough was recognised as the founder of "new nations," may be readily imagined. In the inscription upon a portrait of the king, which belonged to Lord Bacon, he is styled "*Imperii Atlantici conditor.*" This part of Cranmer's prophecy, therefore, would fix the date of the play after the settlement of Virginia. But a new difficulty arises: All that part of the prophecy relating to James, which we have quoted, is held to be an addition, made upon a revival of the play in 1613.

"These lines," says Dr. Johnson, "to the interruption by the king, seem to have been inserted at some revisal of the play, after the accession of King James. If the passage be left out, the speech of Cranmer proceeds in a regular tenor of prediction and continuity of sentiments; but, by the interpolation of the new lines, he first celebrates Elizabeth's successor, and then wishes he did not know she was to die; first rejoices at the consequence, and then laments the cause." Is it so? The presumed interpolation immediately follows these lines:—

"In her days, every man shall eat in safety,
Under his own vine, what he plants; and
sing
The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours," &c.

The poet then adds—

"Nor shall this peace sleep with her: But as
when
The bird of wonder *dies*. * * * *
So shall she leave her blessedness to one,
(*When Heaven shall call her from this cloud
of darkness,*)
Who, from the *sacred ashes* of her honour,
Shall star-like rise."

Is it true, then, that he "first celebrates Elizabeth's successor, and then wishes he did not know she was to die"? Of the seventeen lines which relate to James, the first eleven never lose sight of Elizabeth. Her "blessedness," her "honour," her "fame," were to descend to her "heir." The *exten-*

sion of the dominion of England, under James,—the only passage in which "the greatness of his name" is separated from that of Elizabeth,—occupies the remaining part of the prophecy; and that the thread which connects the whole with Elizabeth may not be dropped, even while those six lines are uttered, Cranmer *returns* to the close of her life, which in two-thirds of the previous seventeen lines he had constantly inferred:—

"She shall be, to the happiness of England,
An aged princess," &c.

It might as well be assumed, we venture to think, that the "*Tu Marcellus eris*" of Virgil is an interpolation. That famous passage is most skilfully connected with all that accompanies it; but it might nevertheless be as easily severed as the lines which are here maintained to be an unskilful addition.

But it is held, further, that Shakspeare did not write these lines; that Ben Jonson wrote them; that Shakspeare might properly compliment Elizabeth in her lifetime, but that he would not descend to flatter James, who was "a contemptible king." Shakspeare, it is well known, had reason to be grateful to James for personal kindnesses; but there is not a word here of James's *personal* qualities. The lines apply to the character of his government—its "peace, plenty, love, truth, terror"—the extension of its growth to "make new nations." Would Jonson, had he written this passage, have forgotten that James was somewhat prouder of his reputation as a scholar than as a king; and that one who knew him well had not hesitated to say to him, and perhaps, indeed, in sincerity, "There has not been since Christ's time any king or temporal monarch which has been so learned in all literature and erudition, divine and human"?* We have no hesitation in accepting the passage as one that Shakspeare might not have blushed to have written, and which derogates nothing from the manly independence of his character.

The later editors consider that the interpolation rested at the interruption of the

* Bacon 'Advancement of Learning.'

king. Theobald would carry it further,—through the remainder of Cranmer's speech: "If this play was wrote, as in my opinion it was, in the reign of Elizabeth, we may easily determine where Cranmer's eulogium of that princess concluded. I make no question but the poet rested here:—

"And by those claim their greatness, not by blood."

Theobald omits to state the most obvious reason for his opinion. We hold that Shakspeare, in the age of Elizabeth, would never have written—

"She shall be, to the happiness of England,
An aged princess."

That passage is also, to our minds, clearly an interpolation, *assuming that the play was produced during Elizabeth's reign.* She, of all sovereigns, would least have endured to be called *aged*; she, of whom, in her seventieth year, the French Ambassador writes, "Her eye is still lively, she has good spirits, and is fond of life, for which reason she takes great care of herself; to which may be added an inclination for the Earl of Clancarty, a brave, handsome Irish nobleman. This makes her cheerful, *full of hope and confidence respecting her age.*" About a year before this time it is held that the 'Henry VIII.' was written, and that it originally included the close of Cranmer's prophecy. "An aged princess!" "But she must die!" Shakspeare must indeed have been a bold man to have ventured upon such truths.

But let us yield the whole question of interpolation to those who assert that the 'Henry VIII.' was written in the time of Elizabeth, and give up even the passage of the "aged princess." It is held that the play was written to please Elizabeth. The memory of Henry VIII., perhaps, was not cherished by her with any deep affection; but would she, who in her dying hour is reported to have said, "My seat has been the seat of kings," allow the frailties, and even the peculiarities, of her father to be made a public spectacle? Would she have borne that his passion for her mother should have been put forward in the strongest way

by the poet—that is, in the sequence of the dramatic action—as the impelling motive for his divorce from Katharine? Would she have tolerated the masque-scene immediately succeeding that in which Katharine is told by her husband, "You have half our power"? Would she have endured that her father, upon his next appearance after the meeting with Anne Bullen, when he exclaims,

"The fairest hand I ever touch'd! O beauty,
Till now I never knew thee!"—

and—

"By Heaven, she is a dainty one!—Sweetheart,
I were unmannerly to take you out,
And not to kiss you"—

that he should be represented in the depth of his hypocrisy gloating over his projected divorce, with—

"But, conscience, conscience,—

Oh, 't is a tender place, *and I must leave her*?"

Would she have been pleased with the jests of the old lady to Anne upon her approaching elevation—her title—her "thousand pound a-year"—and all to be instantly followed by the trial-scene,—that magnificent exhibition of the purity, the constancy, the fortitude, the grandeur of soul, the self-possession, of the "most poor woman and a stranger" that her mother had supplanted; contrasted with the heartless coldness, salved over with a more heartless commendation of his injured wife, from the hypocritical tyrant, who ends the defence of his conduct expressed in

"the sharp thorny points

Of my alleged reasons drive this forward,"

with the real truth, spoken aside,

"I may perceive,

These cardinals trifle with me * * *

Cranmer,

Pr'ythee, return! with thy approach, I know,
My comfort comes?"

Finally, would she have licensed the stage exhibition of her father's traditionary peculiarities, in addition to the portraiture, which cannot be mistaken, of his sensual, arrogant, impatient, and crafty character? Would she have laughed at his perpetual

"ha!"; or taken away Burbage's licence? Would she have wept over the most touching sorrow of the dying Katharine; or sent Shakspeare to join the company of his friend Southampton in the Tower? Those who have written on the subject say she would have borne all this; and that the pageant of her mother's coronation, with the succeeding representation of her own christening, capped with the prophecy of her future greatness, were to ensure the harmlessness of all these somewhat explosive materials, and to carry forward the five acts to a most felicitous conclusion—

"This little one shall make it holiday."

Malone, as it appears to us, says all that can be said, in the literal way, to prove that such a drama as this would be acceptable to Elizabeth: "It is more likely that Shakspeare should have written a play the chief subject of which is the *disgraces* of Queen Katharine, the *aggrandizement* of Anne Boleyn, and the birth of her daughter, in the lifetime of Elizabeth, than after her death; at a time when the subject must have been highly pleasing at court, rather than at a period when it must have been less interesting. Queen Katharine, it is true, is represented as an amiable character, but still she is *eclipsed*; and, the greater her merit, the higher was the compliment to the mother of Elizabeth, *to whose superior beauty she was obliged to give way.*"* This is the prosaic, we may say the essentially groveling, mode of viewing the object of Shakspeare,—an object pre-supposing equal vulgarity of mind in the dramatist and his court audience. Our readers will be sure that we appreciate far more highly Mr. Campbell's poetical creed in this matter:—

"Shakspeare contrives, though at the sacrifice of some historical truth, to raise the matron Katharine to our highest admiration, whilst at the same time he keeps us in love with Anne Boleyn, and on tolerable terms with Henry VIII. But who does not see, under all this wise management, the drift of his design, namely, to compliment Elizabeth as a virgin queen; to

interest us in the memory of her mother Anne Boleyn; and to impress us with a belief of her innocence, though she suffered as an alleged traitress to the bed of Henry? The private death of Katharine of Arragon might have been still remembered by many living persons, but the death of Anne Boleyn was still more fresh in public recollection; and a wiser expedient could not have been devised for asserting the innocence of Elizabeth's mother than by portraying Henry's injustice towards Queen Katharine. For we are obliged to infer that, if the tyrant could thus misuse the noble Katharine, the purest innocence in her lovely successor could be no shield against his cruelty."†

There is one slight objection to this theory. Shakspeare wrote for an audience; and an audience is a thing of impulses; it sympathizes with the oppressed, and hates the oppressor. An audience does not "*infer.*" The poet who trusts to an audience perceiving "the drift of his design" through the veil of a dramatic action which moves their feelings entirely in an opposite direction to that in which he intends them to be moved, has, to our minds at least, a different theory of his art from that of Shakspeare.

We hold that the Prologue which we shall presently examine is a complete exposition of the *idea* of this drama. The Prologue is fastened upon Jonson, upon the theory that he wrote it after Shakspeare's retirement from the stage, when the old play was *revived* in his absence. We believe in the *one* piece of external evidence,—that a 'Henry VIII.' was produced in 1613, when the Globe was burned; that it was a *new play*; that it was then called 'All is True;' and that this title agrees with the idea upon which Shakspeare wrote the 'Henry VIII.' Those who believe that it was written in the time of Elizabeth have to reject this one piece of *external* evidence. We further believe, from the *internal* evidence, that the play, as it stands, was written in the time of James I., and that we have received it in its original form. Those who assert the contrary have to resort to the hypothesis of interpolation, and, further, have to explain how many things

* 'Chronological Order,' p. 390.

† Life. Moxon's edition of Shakspeare.

which are, to a plain understanding, inconsistent with their theory, may be interpreted, by great ingenuity, to be consistent. We believe that Shakspeare, amongst his latest dramas, constructed an historical drama to complete his great series,—one that was agreeable to the tone of his mind after his fiftieth year:—

“Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe.”

Those who take the opposite view hold that the chief object of the poet was to produce something which might be acceptable to Queen Elizabeth. Our belief is the obvious one; the contrary belief may be the more ingenious.

We now proceed to the most remarkable Prologue of the few which are attached to Shakspeare's plays. It thus commences:—

“I come no more to make you laugh; things
now,
That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe,
Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow,
We now present.”

It is, to our minds, a perfect exposition of the principle upon which the poet worked in the construction of this drama. Believing, whatever weight of authority there may be for the contrary opinion, that the ‘Henry VIII.’ was a new play in 1613, there had been a considerable interval between its production and that of the ‘Henry V.’—the last in the order of representation of his previous Histories. During that interval several of the poet's most admirable comedies had been unquestionably produced; and the audience of 1613 was perhaps still revelling in the recollections of the wit of Touchstone, or the more recent whimsies of Autolycus. But the poet, who was equally master of the tears and the smiles of his audience, prepares them for a serious view of the aspects of real life:—“I come no more to make you laugh.” He thought, too, that the popular desire for noisy combats, and the unavoidable deficiencies of the stage in the representation of battle-scenes—he had before described it as an “unworthy scaffold” for “vasty fields”—might be passingly adverted to; and that

the Clowns of the same stage, whom he had indeed reformed, but who still delighted the “ears of the groundlings” with their extemporal rudeness, might be slightly renounced. He disclaimed, then, “both fool and fight:” these were not amongst the attractions of this work of his maturer age. He had to offer weighty and serious things, sad and high things, noble scenes that commanded tears; state and woe were to be exhibited together: there was to be pageantry, but it was to be full of pity; and the woe was to be the more intense from its truth. And how did this master of his art profess to be able to produce such deep emotion from the exhibition of scenes that almost came down to his own times; that the fathers and grandfathers of his audience had witnessed in their unpoetical reality; that belonged not to the period when the sword was the sole arbiter of the destinies of princes and favourites, but when men fell by intrigue and not by battle, and even the axe of the capricious despot struck in the name of the law? There was another great poet of this age of high poetry, who had indicated the general theme which Shakspeare proposed to illustrate in this drama:—

“What man that sees the ever-whirling wheel
Of change, the which all mortal things doth
sway,
But that thereby doth find, and plainly feel,
How Mutability in them doth play
The cruel sports to many men's decay?”*

From the first scene to the last, the dramatic action seems to point to the abiding presence of that power which works

“Her cruel sports to many men's decay.”

We see the “ever-whirling wheel,” in a succession of contrasts of grandeur and debasement; and, even when the action is closed, we are carried forward into the depths of the future, to have the same triumph of “Mutability” suggested to our contemplation. This is the theme which the poet emphatically presents to us under its aspect of sadness:—

“Be sad, as we would make you: Think, ye see
The very persons of our noble story,

* ‘The Faerie Queene.’ Two cantos of Mutabilitie

As they were living; think, you see them great,
And follow'd with the general throng and sweat
Of thousand friends; then, in a moment, see
How soon this mightiness meets misery."

Bearing in mind the great principle of the play, it appears to us to open with singular art. The Field of the Cloth of Gold is presented to our view, not as a mere piece of ordinary description, but as having a dramatic connexion with the principal action. By this description we are at once, and most naturally, introduced to the characters of the proud nobles whose hatred Wolsey has provoked. The sarcastic Norfolk may probably abide the frown of the great cardinal; but in the temperament of the impetuous Buckingham there is inevitable danger. What a portrait of self-willed pride has the poet drawn of Buckingham in all that scene! How the haughty peer first displays his rough contempt of "such a keech" as Wolsey; then throws out his random allegations against his honesty; next encounters him with an eye "full of disdain," and is scarcely kept from following him to the king to "outstare him;" and, finally, lashes himself to the utterance of a torrent of words, while his friends evidently tremble more for him in the consequences of his blind hatred than they look with hope to its power to injure the man whom they equally hate. And how does all this close? In

"my life is spann'd already:
I am the shadow of poor Buckingham,"

we see the coming end of the rash and haughty man;—his "noble blood" will be reckoned as nothing in the "beggar's book;" the "butcher's cur" will tear him.

If the arrest of Buckingham had been followed by his "coming from his arraignment," we should have seen indeed the "misery" following upon the "mightiness;" but we should not have seen the moving cause of this rapid transition of fortune. There sits the absolute king, prejudging his victim before examination:—

"I stood i' the level
Of a full-charged confederacy."

But an interruption takes place. The queen

comes, in the spirit of honesty and justice, to represent to the king that his subjects "are in great grievance." Upon his minister does the king lay the blame, and desires the grievance to be redressed. This looks like equity and moderation:—

"We must not rend our subjects from our laws,
And stick them in our will."

The queen, who has obtained the redress of the subjects' wrong, is to "sit by," and hear the charges against Buckingham. To her upright and sagacious mind it is evident that the charges are the exaggerations of revenge, stimulated by corruption. The king will see only the one side of the evidence. When Katharine exhorts Wolsey to "deliver all with charity," Henry desires the witness to "speak on;" when Katharine lays bare the "spleen" of the Surveyor, with Henry it is still "Let him on." The allegation rests only upon the testimony of a discarded servant as to words spoken; but upon these is the duke condemned; for, after the decision of the king, a trial is but a form:—

"He is attach'd;
Call him to present trial: if he may
Find mercy in the law, 't is his; if none,
Let him not seek 't of us."

It is evident that the hatred of Wolsey produces the fall of Buckingham; but the ambitious minister wields a power which may turn and rend him. All with him, however, is apparent security: his greatness is at its height. The king visits his mighty subject as a familiar friend;—there is masquing and banqueting; and the gay monarch chooses the "fairest hand," and hovers round the one "sweet partner." This is the "state" which is the prelude to the "woe." Between the prejudgment of Buckingham by the king, and his formal condemnation, the cardinal's masque is interposed. It is the wonderful art of Shakspeare in this play to command our entire sympathies for the unfortunate. He has taken no care to render Buckingham an object of our love, or even respect, till he perishes. We think him a wilful man; we see that there is a struggle for power between him and Wolsey: it is his "misery" alone

that makes us "let fall a tear." Amongst the "noble scenes" of this drama, that in which Buckingham addresses "all good people" is very noble. The deepest pathos is in—

"When I came hither I was lord high constable,
And duke of Buckingham; now, poor Edward
Bohun."

But there is a deeper pathos that will "draw the eye to flow." It is foreshadowed to us even while the eye is still wet for Buckingham:—

"Did you not of late days hear
A buzzing, of a separation
Between the King and Katharine?"

The courtiers speak of this freely:—

Cham. It seems the marriage with his
brother's wife
Has crept too near his conscience.
Suf. No, his conscience
Has crept too near another lady."

And shall we "let fall a tear" because a just and spotless wife is about to be parted from a self-willed, capricious, tyrannical husband? If we read her character aright, we shall understand where lies the depth of her "misery." It is not in Anne Bullen's description alone that we can estimate "the pang that pinches." It is not alone that she has "lived long" with "his highness"—

"Still growing in a majesty and pomp, the which
To leave a thousand-fold more bitter than
'Tis sweet at first to acquire."

This is the interpretation of a young woman, to whom "majesty and pomp" look dazzling. In her notion the "divorce" from "temporal" glory is

"a sufferance, panging
As soul and body severing."

It is held that this pity of Anne for her mistress is a stroke of dramatic art to render her amiable under her equivocal situation. Is it not rather the poet's profound display of the weakness of Anne's own character? The sufferings of Katharine lie deeper than this. She is one who feels that she is about to be surrounded with the snares of injustice. She is defenceless—"a most poor woman, and

a stranger." She has been "a true and humble wife." But she is proud—nobly proud:—

"Sir,
I am about to weep; but, thinking that
We are a queen, (or long have dream'd so,)
certain
The daughter of a king, my drops of tears
I'll turn to sparks of fire."

The eloquence of that "simple woman"—her lofty bearing, her bold resolve—is not born of the clinging to temporal pomp: it issues out of the bruised spirit, whose affections are outraged, whose honour is insulted, whose dignity is trodden upon. She is all in all in this great scene. Before the grandeur of her earnest and impassioned pleading the intellect of Wolsey quails, and the self-will of Henry resorts to a justification of his motives. What a picture next is opened of the "poor weak woman, fallen from favour!" The poetry of the situation is unequalled: the queen, sitting amongst her women at work—and listening to that delicious song of "Orpheus with his lute made trees." Then is revealed the innermost grief of that wounded heart:—

"Would ye have me
Put my sick cause into his hands that hates
me?
Alas! he has banish'd me his bed already;
His love, too long ago: I am old, my lords,
And all the fellowship I hold now with him
Is only my obedience. What can happen
To me above this wretchedness?"

But the pride still remains—the daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella speaks in the fallen woman's

"nothing but death
Shall e'er divorce my dignities."
She has lost even the power of making her dependants happy:—

"Alas! poor wenches, where are now your fortunes?"

and then comes, out of this tenderness, the revulsion from that lofty passion to the humility of an absorbing despair:—

"Do what ye will, my lords: And, pray, forgive me,
If I have used myself unmannerly."

There is nothing in the compass of poetry more touching than this exhibition of the gradual subjection of a high spirit to the force of circumstances.

Another turn of "the ever-whirling wheel!" Wolsey next falls. He had none of our sympathies. We gaze upon his commanding intellect; we marvel at "his unbounded stomach;"—but we fear the crafty and daring politician. Up to the moment when the treacherous Henry gathers up his power to hurl the bolt at him—

"and then to breakfast, with

What appetite you have"—

we rejoice at "the instant cloud." But by the exercise of his marvellous art the poet throws the *fallen* man upon our pity. He restores him to his fellowship with humanity by his temporal abasement. The trappings of his ambition are stripped off, and we see him in his natural dignity. He puts on the armour of fortitude, and we reverence him.

The scene is changed. The stage is crowded with processional displays. There has been a coronation. We see it not; but its description is worth more than the sight:—

"The rich stream

Of lords, and ladies, having brought the queen
To a prepared place in the choir, fell off
A distance from her: while her grace sat down
To rest a while, some half an hour, or so,
In a rich chair of state, opposing freely
The beauty of her person to the people."

Anne passes from the stage;—Katharine is led in sick. Her great enemy is dead. She cannot but number up his faults; but she listens to "his good." They have a fellowship in misfortune; and she honours his ashes. She is passing from the world. The grave hides that pure, and gentle, and noble sufferer. Anne is crowned. Her example of

"How soon this mightiness meets misery"

was not to be shown. But who can forget it? Then comes the shadowing out of new intrigues and new hatreds; and the despot puts on an attitude of justice. Elizabeth is born. The link is completed between the generation which is past and the generation which looks upon

"The very persons of our noble story,
As they were living."

Shakspeare has closed his great series of 'Chronicle Histories.' This last of them was to be "sad, high, and working." It has laid bare the hollowness of worldly glory; it has shown the heavy "load" of "too much honour." It has given us a picture of the times which succeeded the feudal strifes of the other 'Histories.' Were they better times? To the mind of the poet the age of corruption was as "sad" as the age of force. The one tyrant rides over the obligations of justice, wielding a power more terrible than that of the sword. The poet's consolation is to be found in the prophetic views of the future. The prophecy of Cranmer upon the reigns of Elizabeth and James is the eulogy of just government—partially realized in the age of Shakspeare, but not the less a high conception, (however beyond the reality,) of

"What makes a nation happy, and keeps it so."

We have a few words to add on the style of this drama. It is remarkable for the elliptical construction of many of the sentences and for an occasional peculiarity in the versification, which is not found in any other of Shakspeare's works. The Roman plays, decidedly amongst the latest of his productions, possess a colloquial freedom of versification which in some cases approaches almost to ruggedness. But in the 'Henry VIII.' this freedom is carried much farther. We have repeated instances in which the lines are so constructed that it is impossible to read them with the slightest pause at the end of each line:—the sentence must be run together, so as to produce more the effect of measured prose than of blank-verse. As an example of what we mean, we will write a sentence of fourteen lines as if it had been printed as prose:—

"Hence I took a thought this was a judgment on me; that my kingdom, well worthy the best heir of the world, should not be gladdened in 't by me: Then follows, that I weigh'd the danger which my realms stood in by this my issue's fail: and that gave to me many a groaning throe. Thus hulling in the wild sea of my conscience, I did steer towards this remedy, whereupon we

are now present here together; that's to say, I meant to rectify my conscience,—which I then did feel full sick, and yet not well,—by all the reverend fathers of the land, and doctors learn'd."

If the reader will turn to the passage (Act II. Scene 4) he will see that many of the lines end with particles, and that scarcely one of the lines is marked by a pause at the termination. Many other passages could be pointed out with this peculiarity. A theory has been set up that Jonson "tampered" with the versification. We hold this notion to be utterly untenable; for there is no play of Shakspeare's which has a more decided character of unity—no one from which any passage could be less easily struck out. We

believe that Shakspeare worked in this particular upon a principle of art which he had proposed to himself to adhere to wherever the nature of the scene would allow. The elliptical construction, and the licence of versification, brought the dialogue, whenever the speaker was not necessarily rhetorical, closer to the language of common life. Of all his historical plays, the 'Henry VIII.' is the nearest in its story to his own times. It professed to be a "truth." It belongs to his own country. It has no poetical indistinctness about it, either of time or place: all is defined. If the diction and the versification had been more artificial, it would have been less a reality.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROMAN PLAYS.

THE three plays of 'Coriolanus,' 'Julius Cæsar,' and 'Antony and Cleopatra,' were first printed in the folio collection of 1623. The German critic, Horn, concludes some remarks upon Shakspeare's 'King John' with a passage that may startle those who believe that the truth of history, and the truth of our great dramatic teacher of history, are altogether different things:—

"The hero of this piece stands not in the list of personages, and could not stand with them; for the idea should be clear without personification. The hero is England.

"What the poet chose to express of his view of the dignity and worth of his native land he has confided to the Bastard to embody in words:—

'This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.'

But Shakspeare is immeasurably more than Faulconbridge, and he would have the reader and the spectator more also. These lines are not intended to be fixed upon England at the beginning of the fourteenth century alone; they are not even confined to Eng-

land generally. They are for the elevation of the views of a state—of a people. Happy for England that she possesses a poet who so many years since has spoken to her people as the highest and most splendid teacher! The full consequences of his teaching have not yet been sufficiently revealed; they may perhaps never wholly be exhibited. We, however, know that in England a praiseworthy zeal for their country's history prevails amongst the people. But who first gave true life to that history?"

In the three great Roman dramas, the idea, not personified, but full of a life that animates and informs every scene, is ROME. Some one said that Chantrey's bust of a great living poet was more like than the poet himself. Shakspeare's Rome, we venture to think, is more like than the Rome of the Romans. It is the idealized Rome, true indeed to her every-day features, but embodying that expression of character which belongs to the universal rather than the accidental. And yet how varied is the idea of Rome which the poet presents to us in these three great mirrors of her history! In the young Rome of Coriolanus we see

the terrible energy of her rising ambition checked and overpowered by the factious violence of her contending *classes*. We know that the prayer of Coriolanus is a vain prayer :—

“The honour’d gods
Keep Rome in safety, and the chairs of justice
Supplied with worthy men ! plant love among
us !
Throng our large temples with the shows of
peace,
And not our streets with war !”

In the matured Rome of Julius Cæsar we see her riches and her glories about to be swallowed up in a domestic conflict of *principles* :—

“Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble
bloods !
When went there by an age, since the great
flood,
But it was famed with more than with one
man ?
When could they say, till now, that talk’d of
Rome,
That her wide walks encompass’d but one
man ?”

In the slightly older Rome of Antony, her power, her magnificence, are ready to perish in the selfishness of *individuals* :—

“Let Rome in Tiber melt ! and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall !”

Rome was saved from anarchy by the supremacy of one. Shakspeare did not live to make the Cæsars more immortal.

Schlegel has observed that “these plays are the very thing itself ; and, under the apparent artlessness of adhering closely to history as he [Shakspeare] found it, an uncommon degree of art is concealed.” The poet almost invariably follows Plutarch, as translated by North, sometimes even to the literal adoption of the biographer’s words. This is the “apparent artlessness.” But Schlegel has also shown us the principles of the “uncommon art :”—“Of every historical transaction Shakspeare knows how to seize the true poetical point of view, and to give unity and rounding to a series of events detached from the immeasurable extent of

history, without in any degree changing them.” But he adopts the literal only when it enters into “the true poetical point of view,” and is therefore in harmony with the general poetical truth, which in many subordinate particulars necessarily discards all pretension of “adhering closely to history.” Jonson has left us two Roman plays produced essentially upon a different principle. In his ‘Sejanus’ there is scarcely a speech or an incident that is not derived from the ancient authorities ; and Jonson’s own edition of the play is crowded with references as minute as would have been required from any modern annalist. In his Address to the Readers, he says—“Lest in some nice nostril the quotations might savour affected, I do let you know that I abhor nothing more ; and I have only done it to show my integrity in the story.” The character of the dramatist’s mind, as well as the abundance of his learning, determined this mode of proceeding : but it is evident that he worked upon a false principle of art. His characters are, therefore, puppets carved and stuffed according to the descriptions, and made to speak according to the very words of Tacitus and Suetonius ;—but they are not living men. It is the same in his ‘Catiline.’ Cicero is the great actor in that play ; and he moves as Sallust, corrected by other authorities, made him move ; and speaks as he spoke himself in his own orations. Jonson gives the whole of Cicero’s first oration against Catiline, in a translation amounting to some three hundred lines. It may be asked, what can we have that may better present Cicero to us than the descriptions of the Roman historians, and Cicero’s own words ? We answer, six lines of Shakspeare, not found in the books :—

“The angry spot doth glow on Cæsar’s brow,
And all the rest look like a chidden train :
Calphurnia’s cheek is pale ; and Cicero
Looks with such ferret and such fiery eyes,
As we have seen him in the Capitol,
Being cross’d in conference by some se-
nators.”

Gifford, speaking of Jonson’s two Roman tragedies, says—“He has apparently suc-

ceeded in his principal object, which was to exhibit the characters of the drama to the spectators of his days precisely as they appeared to those of their own.' The plan was scholastic, but it was not judicious. The difference between the *dramatis personæ* and the spectators was too wide; and the very accuracy to which he aspired would seem to take away much of the power of pleasing. Had he drawn men instead of Romans, his success might have been more assured.* We presume to think that there is here a slight confusion of terms. If Jonson had succeeded in his principal object, and *had* exhibited his characters precisely as they *appeared* in their own days, his representation would have been the truth. But he has drawn, according to this intelligent critic, Romans instead of men, and therefore his success was not perfectly assured. Not drawing *men*, he did not draw his characters as they appeared in their own days: but as he pieced out their supposed appearance from incidental descriptions or formal characterizations—from party historians or prejudiced rhetoricians. If he had drawn *Romans* as they were, he would have drawn *men* as they were. They were not the less men because they were Romans. He failed to draw the men, principally on account of the limited range of his imaginative power; he copied instead of created. He repeated, says Gifford, "the ideas, the language, the allusions," which "could only be readily caught by the contemporaries of Augustus and Tiberius." He gave us, partly on this account also, shadows of life, instead of the "living features of an age so distant from our own," as his biographer yet thinks he gave. Shakspeare worked upon different principles, and certainly with a different success.

The leading idea of 'Coriolanus'—the pivot upon which all the action turns—the key to the bitterness of factious hatred which runs through the whole drama—is the contest for power between the patricians and plebeians. This is a broad principle, assuming various modifications in various states of society, but very slightly varied in

its foundations and its results. He that truly works out the exhibition of this principle must paint *men*, let the scene be the Rome of the first Tribunes, or the Venice of the last Doges. With the very slightest changes of accessaries, the principle stands for the contests between aristocracy and democracy, in any country or in any age—under a republic or a monarchy. The historical truth, and the philosophical principle, which Shakspeare has embodied in 'Coriolanus' are universal. But suppose he had possessed the means of treating the subject with what some would call historical accuracy; had learnt that Plutarch, in the story of 'Coriolanus,' was probably dealing only with a legend; that, if the story is to be received as true, it belongs to a later period; that in this later period there were very nice shades of difference between the classes composing the population of Rome; that the balance of power was a much more complex thing than he found in the narrative of Plutarch: further suppose that, proud of this learning, he had made the universal principle of the plebeian and patrician hostility subsidiary to an exact display of it, according to the conjectures which modern industry and acuteness have brought to bear on the subject. It is evident, we think, that he would have been betrayed into a false principle of art, and would necessarily have drawn Roman shadows instead of vital and enduring men. As it is, he has drawn men so vividly—under such permanent relations to each other—with such universal manifestations of character, that some persons of strong political feelings have been ready to complain, according to their several creeds, either that his plebeians are too brutal, or his patricians too haughty. A polite democracy, a humane oligarchy, would be better. Jonson somewhat rejoices in the amusing exhibition of "plebeian malignity and tribunitian insolence." Hazlitt, who is more than half angry on the other side of the question, says—"The *whole* dramatic moral of 'Coriolanus' is that those who have little shall have less, and that those who have much shall take all that others have left." Let us see.

* 'Memoirs of Jonson,' p. ccxx.—Works, 9 vols.

With his accustomed consummate judgment in his opening scenes, Shakspeare throws us at once into the centre of the contending classes of early Rome. We have no description of the nature of the factions; we behold them:—

“1 *Cit.* You are all resolved rather to die than to famish.

Cit. Resolved, resolved!

1 *Cit.* First, you know, Caius Marcius is chief enemy to the people.

Cit. We know’t, we know’t.

1 *Cit.* Let us kill him, and we’ll have corn at our own price.

Cit. No more talking on’t: let it be done.”

The foundation of the violence is misery;—its great stimulant is ignorance. The people are famishing for want of corn;—they will kill one man, and that will give them corn at their own price: the murder will turn scarcity into plenty. Hazlitt says that Shakspeare “spared no occasion of baiting the rabble.” If to show that misery acting upon ignorance produces the same effects in all ages be “baiting the rabble,” he has baited them. But he has not painted the “mutinous citizens” with an indiscriminating contempt. One that displays a higher power than his fellows of reasoning or remonstrance, and yet is zealous enough to resist what he thinks injustice, says of Caius Marcius,

“Consider you what services he has done for his country.”

The people are sometimes ungrateful; but Shakspeare chose to show that some amongst them could be just. The people have their favourites. “Worthy Menenius Agrippa” has the good word of the mutinous citizens. Shakspeare gave them no unworthy favourite. His rough humour, his true kindness, his noble constancy, form a character that the people have always loved, even whilst they are rebuked and chastened. But, if the poet has exhibited the democratic ignorance in pretty strong colours, has he shrunk from presenting us a full-length portrait of patrician haughtiness? Caius Marcius in the first scene claims no sympathies:—

“Would the nobility lay aside their ruth,

And let me use my sword, I’d make a quarry

With thousands of these quarter’d slaves, as high

As I could pick my lance.”

Till Caius Marcius has become Coriolanus, and we see that the popular violence is under the direction of demagogues—the same never-varying result of the same circumstances—we feel no love for him. It is under oppression and ingratitude that his pride becomes sublime. But he has previously deserved our homage, and in some sort our affection. The poet gradually wins us to an admiration of the hero, by the most skilful management. First, through his mother. What a glorious picture of an antique matron, from whom her son equally derived his pride and his heroism, is presented in the exquisite scene where Volumnia and Valeria talk of him they loved, according to their several natures! Who but Shakspeare could have seized upon the spirit of a Roman woman of the highest courage and mental power bursting out in words such as these?—

“*Vol.* His bloody brow

With his mail’d hand then wiping, forth he goes;

Like to a harvest-man, that’s task’d to mow
Or all, or lose his hire.

Vir. His bloody brow! Oh, Jupiter, no blood!

Vol. Away, you fool! it more becomes a man

Than gilt his trophy: The breasts of Hecuba,
When she did suckle Hector, look’d not
lovelier

Than Hector’s forehead, when it spit forth
blood

At Grecian swords’ contending.

This is a noble preparation for the scenic exhibition of the deeds of Caius Marcius. Amidst the physical strength, and the mental energy, that make the triumphant warrior, the poet, by a few of his magical touches, has shown us the ever-present loftiness of mind that denotes qualities far beyond those which belong to mere animal courage. His contempt of the Romans who are “beaten back,” and the “Romans with spoils,” is equally withering. It is not sufficient for him to win one battle. The force of character through which he thinks that nothing

is done whilst anything remains to do, shows that Shakspeare understood the stuff of which a great general is made. His remonstrance to Cominius—

“Where is the enemy? Are you lords o’ the field?”

If not, why cease you till you are so?”—

is not in Plutarch. It is supplied to us by a higher authority,—by the instinct by which Shakspeare knew the great secret of success in every enterprise—the determination to be successful. One example more of the skill with which Shakspeare makes Caius Marcius gradually obtain the uncontrolled homage of our hearts. The proud conqueror who rejects all gifts and honours, who has said,

“I have some wounds upon me, and they smart
To hear themselves remember’d,”

asks a gift of his superior officer:—

“*Cor.* I sometime lay, here in Corioli,
At a poor man’s house; he used me kindly:
He cried to me; I saw him prisoner;
But then Aufidius was within my view,
And wrath o’erwhelm’d my pity: I request
you
To give my poor host freedom.”

We now see only the true hero. He realizes the noble description of the “Happy Warrior” which the great poet of our own days has drawn with so masterly a hand:—

“Who, doom’d to go in company with Pain,
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train!
Turns his necessity to glorious gain;
In face of these doth exercise a power
Which is our human nature’s highest dower;
Controls them and subdues, transmutes, be-
reaves
Of their bad influence, and their good receives,
By objects, which might force the soul to abate
Her feeling, render’d more compassionate.”

We have forgotten the fierce patrician who would make a quarry of the Roman populace.

And this, we suppose, is what Hazlitt objects to in Shakspeare’s conduct of this play. The character of Coriolanus rises upon us. The sufferings and complaints of his enemies are merged in their factious hatred. “Poetry,” says the critic, “is right royal.”

It puts the individual for the species, the one above the infinite many, might before right.” Now we apprehend that Shakspeare has not treated the subject of Coriolanus after this right royal fashion of poetry. He has dealt fairly with the vices as well as the virtues of his hero. The scene in the second act, in which Coriolanus stands for the consulship, is amongst the most remarkable examples of Shakspeare’s insight into character. In Plutarch he found a simple fact related without any comment:—“Now, Marcius, following this custom, showed many wounds and cuts upon his body, which he had received in seventeen years’ service at the wars, and in many sundry battles, being ever the foremost man that did set out feet to fight; so that there was not a man among the people but was ashamed of himself to refuse so valiant a man; and one of them said to another, We must needs choose him consul, there is no remedy.” But in his representation of this fact Shakspeare had to create a character, and to make that character act and re-act upon the character of the people. Coriolanus was essentially and necessarily proud. His education, his social position, his individual supremacy made him so. He lives in a city of factions, and he dislikes, of course, the faction opposed to his order. The people represent the opinions that he dislikes, and he therefore dislikes the people. That he has pity and love for humanity, however humble, we have already seen. Coming into contact with the Roman populace for their suffrages, his uppermost thought is “bid them wash their faces and keep their teeth clean.” He outwardly despises that vanity of the people which will not reward desert unless it go hand in hand with solicitation. He betrays his contempt for the canvassed, even whilst he is canvassing:—

“I will, sir, flatter my sworn brother the people, to earn a dearer estimation of them; ’t is a condition they account gentle: and, since the wisdom of their choice is rather to have my hat than my heart, I will practise the insinuating nod, and be off to them most counterfeitedly: that is, sir, I will counterfeit the bewitchment of some popular man, and give it bountifully

to the desirers. Therefore, beseech you, I may be consul."

The satire is not obsolete. The desperation with which he at last roars out his demand for their voices, as if he were a chorus mocking himself and the people with the most bitter irony, is the climax of this wonderful exhibition:—

"Your voices: for your voices I have fought;
Watch'd for your voices; for your voices, bear
Of wounds two dozen odd; battles thrice six
I have seen and heard of; for your voices
Have done many things, some less, some
more: your voices:
Indeed, I would be consul."

The people have justice enough to elect the man for his deeds: but they have not strength enough to abide by their own election. When they are told by the Tribunes that they have been treated scornfully, they can bear to be rebuked by their demagogues—to have their "ignorant election" revoked—to suffer falsehoods to be put in their mouth,—to be the mere tools of their weak though crafty leaders. It is Shakspeare's praise, in his representation of this plebeian and patrician conflict, that he, for the most part, shows the people as they always are,—just, generous, up to a certain point. But put that thing called a demagogue amongst them,—that cold, grovelling, selfish thing, without sympathies for the people, the real despiser of the people, because he uses them as tools,—and then there is no limit to their unjust violence. In the subsequent scenes we see not the people at all in the exercise of their own wills. We see only Brutus and Sicinius speaking the voice, not of the people, but of their individual selfishness. In the first scene of the third act the Tribunes insult Coriolanus; and from that moment the lion lashes himself up into a fury which will be deadly. The catastrophe is only deferred when the popular clamour for the Tarpeian Rock subsides into the demand that he should answer to them once again in the market-place. The mother of Coriolanus abates something of her high nature when she counsels her son to a dissembling submission:—

"*Vol.* Because that now it lies you on to speak

To the people; not by your own instruction,
Nor by the matter which your heart prompts
you,

But with such words that are but roted in
Your tongue, though but bastards, and syllables

Of no allowance, to your bosom's truth."

This is the prudence even of an heroic woman; but she fears for her son. She is somewhat lowered by the instruction. But the poet knew that a real contempt for the people, allied to a strong desire for the honours which the people have to bestow, must produce this lip-service. Coriolanus does not heed the instructions of his mother. He approaches temperately to his questioners; he puts up vows for the safety of Rome from the depths of his full heart; he is in earnest to smother his pride and his resentment, but the coarse Tribune calls him "traitor." There can be but one issue; he is banished.

Some of the historians say that, although Coriolanus joined the enemies of his country, he provoked no jealousies amongst the native leaders of those enemies; that he died honoured and rewarded; that his memory was even revered at Rome. Shakspeare probably knew not this version of the legend of Coriolanus. If he had known it, he would not have adopted it. He had to show the false step which Coriolanus took. He had to teach that his proud resentment hurried him upon a course which brought evils worse than the Tarpeian Rock. And yet we are compelled to admire him; we can scarcely blame him. It has not been our good fortune to see John Kemble in this his greatest character: if we had, we probably should have received into our minds an embodied image of the moral grandeur of that scene when Coriolanus stands upon the hearth of Tullus Aufidius, and says—

"My name is Caius Marcius, who hath done
To thee particularly, and to all the Volscies,
Great hurt and mischief."

The words are almost literally copied from Plutarch; but the wondrous art of the poet is shown in the perfect agreement of these

words with the minutest traits of the man's character which had preceded them. The answer of Aufidius is not in Plutarch; and here Shakspeare invests the rival of Coriolanus with a majesty of language which has for its main object to call us back to the real greatness of the banished man:—

“Know thou first,
I loved the maid I married; never man
Sigh'd truer breath; but that I see thee here,
Thou noble thing! more dances my rapt heart
Than when I first my wedded mistress saw
Bestride my threshold.”

Brief and rapid is their agreement to make war upon Rome. In the great city herself “Coriolanus is not much missed but with his friends,” according to the Tribune; no harm can come to Rome; the popular authority will whip the slave that speaks of evil news. Shakspeare again “baits the rabble,” according to Hazlitt; though he reluctantly adds, “what he says of them is very true:”—

Cit. 'Faith, we hear fearful news.

1 *Cit.* For mine own part,
When I said banish him, I said 't was pity.

2 *Cit.* And so did I.

3 *Cit.* And so did I; and, to say the truth, so did very many of us: That we did we did for the best; and though we willingly consented to his banishment, yet it was against our will.”

When Shakspeare made Coriolanus ask the freedom of the poor man that had used him kindly, he showed the tenderness that was at the bottom of that proud heart. When Rome is beleaguered, Cominius reports thus of his unsuccessful mission to her banished son:—

“*Com.* I offer'd to awaken his regard
For his private friends: His answer to me was,
He could not stay to pick them in a pile
Of noisome musty chaff: He said, 't was folly
For one poor grain or two to leave unburnt,
And still to nose the offence.”

His old general and companion in arms touched nothing but his pride. Menenius, his “beloved in Rome,” undertakes a similar mission. The answer of Coriolanus is—

“Wife, mother, child, I know not. My affairs
Are servanted to others.”

At the moment that Coriolanus has declared to Aufidius

“Fresh embassies, and suits,
Nor from the state, nor private friends, here-
after
Will I lend ear to,”

his mother, his wife, his child appear. But he will stand

“As if a man were author of himself,
And knew no other kin.”

What a scene follows! The warrior is externally calm, as if he were a god, above all passions and affections. The wondrous poetry in which he speaks seems in its full harmony as if it held the man's inmost soul in a profound consistency. But the passion is coming. “I have sat too long” is the prelude to

“O mother, mother!

What have you done? Behold, the heavens do
ope,

The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
They laugh at. O my mother, mother! Oh!
You have won a happy victory to Rome:
But, for your son,—believe it, oh, believe it,
Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,
If not most mortal to him.”

Volumnia speaks no other word. The mother and the son, the wife and the husband, the child and the father, have parted for ever. The death of Coriolanus in the “goodly city” of Antium is inevitable:—

“*Cor.* Cut me to pieces, Volscies; men and
lads,
Stain all your edges on me.—Boy! False
hound!

If you have writ your annals true, 't is there,
That, like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli:
Alone I did it.—Boy!

Auf. Why, noble lords,
Will you be put in mind of his blind fortune,
Which was your shame, by this unholy brag-
gart,

'Fore your own eyes and ears?

Con. Let him die for 't.”

The struggle for power amongst the CLASSES of young Rome ends in the death of the proud patrician by the swords of those whom he had

conquered. He had presented his throat to Tullus Aufidius,

"Which not to cut would show thee but a fool."

But Aufidius would first use him who said he would fight

"Against my canker'd country with the spleen
Of all the under fiends."

The retribution is a fearful one. Hazlitt observes, "What Shakspeare says of them [the rabble] is very true; what he says of their betters is also very true, *though he dwells less upon it.*" Shakspeare teaches by action as well as by words. The silly rabble escape with a terrible fright: Coriolanus loses his home, his glory, his life, for his pride and his revenge.

Years, perhaps centuries, had rolled on. Rome had seen a constitution which had reconciled the differences of the patricians and the plebeians. The two orders had built a temple to Concord. Her power had increased; her territory had extended. In compounding their differences the patricians and the plebeians had appropriated to themselves all the wealth and honours of the state. There was a neglected class that the social system appeared to reject as well as to despise. The aristocratic party was again brought into a more terrible conflict with the impoverished and the destitute. Civil war was the natural result. Sulla established a short-lived constitution. The dissolution of the Republic was at hand: the struggle was henceforth to be, not between classes, but individuals. The death of Julius Cæsar was soon followed by the final termination of the contest between the republican and the monarchical *principle*. Shakspeare saw the grandeur of the crisis; and he seized upon it for one of his lofty expositions of political philosophy. He has treated it as no other poet would have treated it, because he saw the exact relations of the contending principle to the future great history of mankind. The death of Cæsar was not his catastrophe: it was the death of the Roman Republic at Philippi.

Shakspeare, in the opening scene of his

'Julius Cæsar,' has marked very distinctly the difference between the citizens of this period and the former period of 'Coriolanus.' In the first play they are a turbulent body, without regular occupation. They are in some respects a military body. They would revenge with their pikes: the wars would eat them up. In 'Julius Cæsar,' on the contrary, they are "mechanical"—the carpenter or the cobbler. They "make holiday to see Cæsar, and to rejoice in his triumph." The speech of Marullus, the Tribune, brings the Rome of the hour vividly before us. It is the Rome of mighty conquests and terrible factions. Pompey has had his triumphs, and now the men of Rome

"Strew flowers in his way,
That comes in triumph over Pompey's blood."

But the triumphant man himself appears. When he speaks, the music and the shouts are silent. When he speaks not, the air is again filled with sounds of greeting. There is a voice in the crowd, "shriller than the music." The Soothsayer cries, "Beware the Ides of March;" but "he is a dreamer." The procession passes on; two men remain who are to make the dream a reality. Of all Shakspeare's characters none require to be studied with more patient attention than those of Brutus and Cassius, that we may understand the resemblances and the differences of each. The leading distinctions between these two remarkable men, as drawn by Shakspeare, appear to us to be these: Brutus acts wholly upon principle; Cassius partly upon impulse. Brutus acts only when he has reconciled the contemplation of action with his speculative opinions; Cassius allows the necessity of *some* action to run before and govern his opinions. Brutus is a philosopher; Cassius is a partisan. Brutus therefore deliberates and spares; Cassius precipitates and denounces. Brutus is the nobler instructor; Cassius the better politician. Shakspeare, in the first great scene between them, brings out these distinctions of character upon which future events so mainly depend. Cassius does not, like a merely crafty man, use only the arguments to conspiracy which will most touch Brutus;

but he mixes with them, in his zeal and vehemence, those which have presented themselves most strongly to his own mind. He had a personal dislike of Cæsar, as Cæsar had of him. Cassius begins artfully: he would first move Brutus through his affection, and next through his self-love. He is opening a set discourse on his own sincerity, when the shouting of the people makes Brutus express his fear that they "choose Cæsar for their king." Cassius at once leaves his prepared speeches, and assumes that because Brutus fears it he would not have it so:—

"I would not, Cassius; yet I love him well."

Cassius sees that the love which Brutus bears to Cæsar will be an obstacle; and he goes on to disparage Cæsar. He could not buffet the waves with Cassius: when he had a fever in Spain,

"Alas! *it* cried, 'Give me some drink, Titinius.'"

Brutus answers not, but marks "another general shout." Cassius then strikes a different note:—

"Brutus and Cæsar: What should be in that Cæsar?"

Why should that name be sounded more than yours?"

At last Cassius hits upon a *principle*:—

"Oh! you and I have heard our fathers say,
There was a Brutus once that would have
brook'd

The eternal devil to keep his state in Rome,
As easily as a king."

The Stoic is at last moved:—

"Brutus had rather be a villager,
Than to repute himself a son of Rome
Under these hard conditions as this time
Is like to lay upon us."

In the next scene, when Cæsar is returning from the games, the dictator describes Cassius—the Cassius with "a lean and hungry look," the "great observer,"—as one whom he could fear if he could fear anything. In the subsequent dialogue with Casca, where the narrative of what passed at the games is conducted with a truth that puts the very scene before us, Cassius again

strikes in with the thought that is uppermost in his mind. Brutus says that Cæsar "hath the falling sickness:" the reply of Cassius is most characteristic:—

"No, Cæsar hath it not; but you, and I,
And honest Casca, we have the falling sickness."

Brutus goes home to meditate. The energy of Cassius is never weary. In the storm he is still the conspirator. The "impatience of the heavens" furnishes him an argument against the man

"Prodigious grown,
And fearful, as these strange eruptions are."

The plot is maturing. Brutus especially is to be won.

Coleridge, who, when he doubts of a meaning in Shakspeare—or, what is rarer, suggests that there is some inconsistency in the conduct of the scene, or the development of character—has the highest claim upon our deferential regard, gives the soliloquy of Brutus in the beginning of the second act with the following observations:—"This speech is singular;—at least I do not at present see into Shakspeare's motive, his *rationale*, or in what point of view he meant Brutus' character to appear. For surely—(this I mean is what I say to myself, with my present *quantum* of insight, only modified by my experience in how many instances I had ripened into a perception of beauties, where I had before descried faults)—surely, nothing can seem more discordant with our historical preconceptions of Brutus, or more lowering the intellect of the Stoico-Platonic tyrannicide, than the tenets here attributed to him—to him,—the stern Roman republican; namely,—that he would have no objection to a king, or to Cæsar, a monarch in Rome, would Cæsar but be as good a monarch as he now seems disposed to be! How, too, could Brutus say that he found no personal cause—none—in Cæsar's past conduct as a man? Had he not passed the Rubicon? Had he not entered Rome as a conqueror? Had he not placed his Gauls in the Senate?—Shakspeare, it may be said, has not brought these things forward.—True;—and this is just the ground

of my perplexity. What character did Shakspeare mean his Brutus to be?"* To this question we venture to reply, according to our imperfect conception of the character of Brutus. Shakspeare meant him not for a conspirator. He has a terror of conspiracy:—

"Where wilt thou find a cavern dark enough
To mask thy monstrous visage?"

He has been "with himself at war," speculating, we doubt not, upon the strides of Cæsar towards absolute power, but unprepared to resist them. Of Cæsar he has said, "I love him well;" he now says—

"I know no personal cause to spurn at him."

We are by no means sure of the correct punctuation of this passage as it is usually given. Brutus has come to a conclusion in the watches of the night:—

"It must be by his death."

He disavows, however, any personal hatred to Cæsar:—

"And for my part,
I know no *personal* cause to spurn at him."

He then adds—

"But for the *general*—he would be crown'd;
How that might change his nature, there's
the question."

He goes from the personal cause to the general cause: "He would be crown'd." As a triumvir, a dictator, Brutus had no personal cause against Cæsar; but the name of king, which Cassius poured into his ear, rouses all his speculative republicanism. His experience of Cæsar calls from him the acknowledgment that Cæsar's affections sway not more than his reason; but crown him, and his nature might be changed. We must bear in mind that Brutus is not yet committed to the conspiracy. The character that Shakspeare meant his Brutus to be is not yet fully developed. He is yet irresolute; and his reasonings are therefore, to a certain extent, inconsequential:—

"Since Cassius first did whet me against Cæsar
I have not slept."

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma, or a hideous dream."

He is instigated from without; the principles associated with the name of Brutus stir him from within:—

"My ancestors did from the streets of Rome
The Tarquin drive, when he was call'd a
king."

The "faction" come. Cassius and Brutus speak together apart. Let us turn aside for a moment to see how Shakspeare fills up this terrible pause. Other poets would have made the inferior men exchange oaths, and cross swords, and whisper, and ejaculate. He makes everything depend upon the determination of Brutus and Cassius; and the others, knowing it so depends, speak thus:—

"*Dec.* Here lies the east: Doth not the day
break here?"

Casca. No.

Cin. Oh, pardon, sir, it doth; and yon gray
lines

That fret the clouds are messengers of day.

Casca. You shall confess that you are both
deceived.

Here, as I point my sword, the sun arises;
Which is a great way growing on the south,
Weighing the youthful season of the year.
Some two months hence, up higher toward
the north

He first presents his fire; and the high east
Stands, as the Capitol, directly here."

Is this nature? The truest and most profound nature. The minds of all men thus disencumber themselves, in the moments of the most anxious suspense, from the pressure of an overwhelming thought. There is a real relief, if some accidental circumstance, like

"The gray lines that fret the clouds,"

can produce this disposition of the mind to go out of itself for an instant or two of forgetfulness.

But Brutus is changed. We have no doubt *now* of his character. He is the leader, Cassius the subordinate. He is decided in his course: he will not "break with" Cicero; he will not destroy Antony. We recognise

* 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 139.

the gentleness of his nature even while he is preparing for assassination :—

“Oh, that we then could come by Cæsar’s spirit,
And not dismember Cæsar !”

In the exquisite scene with Portia which follows, our love for the man is completed ; we learn what he has suffered before he has taken his resolution. There is something more than commonly touching in these words :—

“You are my true and honourable wife ;
As dear to me as are the ruddy drops
That visit my sad heart.”

The pathos in some degree depends upon our knowledge of the situation of the speaker, which Portia does not know.

The scenes which we have now run over bring us to the end of the second act. Nothing can be more interesting, we think, than to follow Shakspeare with Plutarch in hand. The poet adheres to the facts of history with a remarkable fidelity. A few hard figures are painted upon a canvas ; the outlines are distinct, the colours are strong ; but there is no art in the composition, no grouping, no light and shadow. This is the historian’s picture. We turn to the poet. We recognise the same figures, but they appear to live ; they are in harmony with the entire scene in which they move ; we have at once the reality of nature, and the ideal of art, which is a higher nature. Compare the dialogue in the first act between Cassius and Brutus, and the same dialogue as reported by Plutarch, for an example of the power by which the poet elevates all he touches, without destroying its identity. When we arrive at the stirring scenes of the third act this power is still more manifest. The assassination scene is as literal as may be ; but it offers an example apt enough of Shakspeare’s mode of dramatizing a fact. When Metellus Cimber makes suit for his brother, and the conspirators appear as intercessors, the historian says—“Cæsar at the first simply refused their kindness and entreaties ; but afterwards, perceiving they still pressed on him, he violently thrust them from him.” The poet enters into the mind of Cæsar, and clothes this rejection of

the suit in characteristic words. Hazlitt, after noticing the profound knowledge of character displayed by Shakspeare in this play, says—“If there is any exception to this remark, it is in the hero of the piece himself. We do not much admire the representation here given of Julius Cæsar, nor do we think it answers the portrait given of him in his ‘Commentaries.’ He makes several vapouring and rather pedantic speeches, and does nothing. Indeed, he has nothing to do. So far, the fault of the character is the fault of the plot.” The echoes of this opinion are many ; and smaller critics wax bold upon the occasion. Boswell says—“There cannot be a stronger proof of Shakspeare’s deficiency in classical knowledge than the boastful language he has put in the mouth of the most accomplished man of all antiquity, who was not more admirable for his achievements than for the dignified simplicity with which he has recorded them.” Courtenay had hazarded, in his notice of ‘Henry VIII.,’ the somewhat bold assertion “that Shakspeare used very little artifice, and, in truth, had very little design, in the construction of the greater number of his historical characters.” Upon the character of Julius Cæsar he says that Plutarch having been supposed to pass over this character somewhat slightly is “a corroboration of my remark upon the slight attention which Shakspeare paid to his historical characters. The conversation with Antony about fat men, and with Calphurnia about her dreams, came conveniently into his plan ; and some lofty expressions could hardly be avoided in portraying one who was known to the whole world as a great conqueror. Beyond this our poet gave himself no trouble.” This is certainly an easy way of disposing of a complicated question. Did Shakspeare give himself no trouble about the characterization of Brutus and Cassius ? In them did he indicate no points of character but what he found in Plutarch ? Is not his characterization of Cæsar himself a considerable expansion of what he found set down by the historian ? At the exact period of the action of this drama, Cæsar, possessing the reality of power, was haunted by the weakness of

passionately desiring the title of king. Plutarch says—"The chiefest cause that made him mortally hated was the covetous desire he had to be called king." This is the pivot upon which the whole action of Shakspeare's tragedy turns. There might have been another mode of treating the subject. The death of Julius Cæsar might have been the catastrophe. The republican and the monarchical principles might have been exhibited in conflict. The republican principle would have triumphed in the fall of Cæsar; and the poet would have previously held the balance between the two principles, or have claimed, indeed, our largest sympathies for the principles of Cæsar and his friends, by a true exhibition of Cæsar's greatness and Cæsar's virtues. The poet chose another course. And are we, then, to talk, with ready flippancy, of ignorance and carelessness—that he wanted classical knowledge—that he gave himself no trouble? "The fault of the character is the fault of the plot," says Hazlitt. It would have been nearer the truth had he said—the character is determined by the plot. While Cæsar is upon the scene, it was for the poet, largely interpreting the historian, to show the inward workings of "the covetous desire he had to be called king:" and most admirably, according to our notions of characterization, has he shown them. Cæsar is "in all but name a king." He is surrounded by all the external attributes of power; yet he is not satisfied:—

"The angry spot doth glow on Cæsar's brow."

He is suspicious—he fears. But he has acquired the policy of greatness—to seem what it is not. To his intimate friend he is an actor:—

"I rather tell thee what is to be fear'd
Than what I fear; for always I am Cæsar."

When Calphurnia has recounted the terrible portents of the night—when the augurers would not that Cæsar should stir forth—he exclaims:—

"The gods do this in shame of cowardice:
Cæsar should be a beast without a heart,
If he should stay at home to-day for fear."

No, Cæsar shall not: Danger knows full well
That Cæsar is more dangerous than he.
We were two lions litter'd in one day,
And I the elder and more terrible;
And Cæsar shall go forth."

But to whom does he utter this, the "boastful language," which so offends Boswell? To the servant who has brought the message from the augurers; before *him* he could show no fear. But the very inflation of his language shows that he did fear; and an instant after, when the servant no doubt is intended to have left the scene, he says to his wife—

"Mark Antony shall say I am not well,
And, for thy humour, I will stay at home."

Read Plutarch's account of the scene between Decius and Cæsar, when Decius prevails against Calphurnia, and Cæsar decides to go. In the historian we have not a hint of the splendid characterization of Cæsar struggling between his fear and his pride. Wherever Shakspeare found a minute touch in the historian that could harmonise with his general plan, he embodied it in his character of Cæsar. Who does not remember the magnificent lines which the poet puts into the mouth of Cæsar?—

"Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once.
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should
fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come."

A very slight passage in Plutarch, with reference to other circumstances of Cæsar's life, suggested this:—"When some of his friends did counsel him to have a guard for the safety of his person, and some also did offer themselves to serve him, he would never consent to it, but said it was better to die once than always to be afraid of death." We have already noticed the skill with which Shakspeare, upon a very bald narrative, has dramatised the last sad scene in which Cæsar was an actor. The tone of his last speech is indeed boastful:—

"I do know but one
That unassailable holds on his rank,

Unshaked of motion: and, that I am he,
Let me a little show it."

That Cæsar knew his power, and made others know it, who can doubt? He was not one who, in his desire to be king, would put on the robe of humility. Altogether, then, we profess to receive Shakspeare's characterization of Cæsar with a perfect confidence that he produced that character upon fixed principles of art. It is not the prominent character of the play; and it was not meant to be so. It is true to the narrative upon which Shakspeare founded it; but, what is of more importance, it is true to every natural conception of what Cæsar must have been at the exact moment of his fall.

We have seen the stoic Brutus—in reality a man of strong passions and deep feelings—gradually warm up to the great enterprise of asserting his principles by one terrible blow, for triumph or for extinction. The blow is given. The excitement which succeeds is wondrously painted by the poet, without a hint from the historian. The calm of the gentle Brutus is lifted up, for the moment, into an attitude of terrible sublimity. It is he who says—

"Stoop, Romans, stoop,
And let us bathe our hands in Cæsar's blood
Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords:
Then walk we forth, even to the market-place;
And, waving our red weapons o'er our heads,
Let's all cry, Peace, Freedom, and Liberty!"

From that moment the character flags; the calmness returns; something also of the irresolution comes back. Brutus is too high-minded for his position. Another comes upon the scene; another of different temperament, of different powers. He is not one that, like Brutus, will change "offence" to "virtue and to worthiness" by the force of character. He is one that "revels long o' nights." But he possesses courage, eloquence, high talent, and, what renders him most dangerous, he is sufficiently unprincipled. Cassius knew him, and would have killed him. Brutus does not know him, and he suffers him "to bury Cæsar." The conditions upon which Brutus permits Antony to speak are Shakspeare's own; and they

show his wonderful penetration into the depths of character:—

"You shall not in your funeral speech blame us,
But speak all good you can devise of Cæsar;
And say you do't by our permission;
Else shall you not have any hand at all
About his funeral: And you shall speak,
In the same pulpit whereto I am going,
After my speech is ended."

The opportunity is not lost by Antony. Hazlitt, acute enough in general, appears to us singularly superficial in his remarks on this play:—"Mark Antony's speech over the dead body of Cæsar has been justly admired for the mixture of pathos and art in it: that of Brutus certainly is not so good." In what way is it not so good? As a specimen of eloquence, put by the side of Antony's, who can doubt that it is tame, passionless, severe, and therefore ineffective? But, as an example of Shakspeare's wonderful power of characterization, it is beyond all praise. It was the consummate artifice of Antony that made him say—

"I am no orator, as Brutus is."

Brutus was *not* an orator. Under great excitement he is twice betrayed into oratory: when he addresses the conspirators—"No, not an oath;" and after the assassination—"Stoop, Romans, stoop." He is a man of just intentions, of calm understanding, of settled purpose, when his principles are to become actions. But his notion of oratory is this:—

"I will myself into the pulpit first,
And show the reason of our Cæsar's death."

And he does show the *reason*. The critics have made amusing work with this speech. Warburton says, "This speech of Brutus is wrote in imitation of his famed laconic brevity, and is very fine in its kind; but no more like that brevity than his times were like Brutus'." To this Mr. Monk Mason rejoins,—"I cannot agree with Warburton that this speech is very fine in its kind. I can see no degree of excellence in it, but think it a very paltry speech, for so great a man, on so great an occasion." The commentators have not a word of approbation

for the speech of Antony to counterbalance this. There was a man, however, of their times, Martin Sherlock, who wrote 'A Fragment on Shakspeare,' in a style sufficiently hyperbolical, but who nevertheless was amongst the few who then ventured to think that "the barbarian," Shakspeare, possessed art and judgment. Of Antony's speech he thus expresses his opinion:—"Every line of this speech deserves an eulogium; and, when you have examined it attentively, you will allow it, and will say with me that neither Demosthenes, nor Cicero, nor their glorious rival, the immortal Chatham, ever made a better." There may be exaggerations in both styles of criticism: the speech of Antony may not be equal to Demosthenes, and the speech of Brutus may not be a very paltry speech. But, each being written by the same man, we have a right to accept each with a conviction that the writer was capable of making a good speech for Brutus as well as for Antony; and that, if he did not do so, he had very abundant reasons. It requires no great refinement to understand his reasons. The excitement of the great assertion of republican principles, which was to be acted over,

"In states unborn, and accents yet unknown,"
had been succeeded by a momentary calm. In the very hour of the assassination Brutus had become its apologist to Antony:—

"Our reasons are so full of good regard,
That were you, Antony, the son of Cæsar,
You should be satisfied."

He is already preparing in mind for "the pulpit." He will present, calmly and dispassionately, the "reason of our Cæsar's death." He expects that Antony will speak with equal moderation—all good of Cæsar,—no blame of Cæsar's murderers; and he thinks it an advantage to speak *before* Antony. He knew not what *oratory* really is. But Shakspeare knew, and he painted Antony. Another great poet made the portrait a description:—

"He seem'd
For dignity composed and high exploit:
But all was false and hollow; though his
tongue

Dropp'd manna, and could make the worse
appear

The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest counsels: for his thoughts were low;
To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds
Timorous and slothful: yet he pleased the ear."

The end of Antony's oratory is perfect success:—

"Now let it work! Mischief, thou art afoot,
Take thou what course thou wilt!"

The rhetoric has done its work: the conflict of principles is coming to a close; the conflict of individuals is about to begin; it is no longer a question of republican Rome, or monarchical Rome. The question is whether it shall be the Rome of Antony, or the Rome of Octavius; for Lepidus there is no chance:—

"This is a slight unmeritable man."

But even he is ready to do his work. He can proscribe; he can even consent to the death of his brother, "upon conditions." He requires that "Publius shall not live." Antony has no scruples to save his "sister's son:—

"He shall not live: look, with a spot I damn
him."

Such an intense representation of selfishness was never before given in a dozen lines. What power have Brutus and Cassius to oppose to this worldly wisdom? Is it the virtue of Brutus? Of him who

"Condemn'd and noted Lucius Pella,
For taking bribes here of the Sardians."

Of him who

"Had rather be a dog, and bay the moon,"
than

"Contaminate his fingers."

Of him who says—

"I had rather coin my heart,
And drop my blood for drachmas, than to
wring
From the hard hands of peasants their vile
trash
By any indirection."

No; the man of principles must fall before the men of expediency. He can conquer

Cassius by his high-mindedness ; for Cassius, though somewhat politic, has nobility enough in him to bow before the majesty of virtue. Coleridge says—"I know no part of Shakspeare that more impresses on me the belief of his genius being superhuman than this scene between Brutus and Cassius." This language has been called idolatry : some critic, we believe, says "blasphemous ;" yet let any one with common human powers try to produce such a scene. The wonderful thing in it, and that which—in a subsequent sentence, which we scarcely dare quote—Coleridge points out, is the complete preservation of character. All dramatic poets have tried to imitate this scene. Dryden preferred his imitation, in the famous dialogue between Antony and Ventidius, to anything which he had written "in this kind." It is full of high rhetoric, no doubt ; but its rhetoric is that of generalizations. The plain rough soldier, the luxurious chief, reproach and weep, are angry and cool again, shake hands, and end in "hugging," as the stage direction has it. They say all that people would say under such circumstances, and they say it well. But the matchless art of Shakspeare consists as much in what he holds back as in what he puts forward. Brutus subdues Cassius by the force of his moral strength, without the slightest attempt to command the feelings of a sensitive man. When Cassius is subdued, he owns that he has been hasty. They are friends again, hand and heart. Is not the knowledge of character something above the ordinary reach of human sagacity when the following words come in as if by accident ?—

"*Bru.* Lucius, a bowl of wine.

Cass. I did not think you could have been so angry.

Bru. O Cassius, I am sick of many griefs.

Cass. Of your philosophy you make no use, If you give place to accidental evils.

Bru. No man bears sorrow better :—Portia is dead.

Cass. Ha ! Portia ?

Bru. She is dead.

Cass. How 'scaped I killing when I cross'd you so ?"

This is not in Plutarch.

The shade of Cæsar has summoned Brutus to meet him at Philippi. The conversation of the republican chiefs before the battle is well to be noted :—

"*Cass.* Now, most noble Brutus,
The gods to-day stand friendly ; that we may,
Lovers in peace, lead on our days to age !
But, since the affairs of men rest still uncertain,

Let's reason with the worst that may befall.
If we do lose this battle, then is this
The very last time we shall speak together :
What are you then determined to do ?

Bru. Even by the rule of that philosophy
By which I did blame Cato for the death
Which he did give himself :—I know not how,
But I do find it cowardly and vile,
For fear of what might fall, so to prevent
The time of life :—arming myself with patience,

To stay the providence of some high powers,
That govern us below.

Cass. Then, if we lose this battle,
You are contented to be led in triumph
Thorough the streets of Rome ?

Bru. No, Cassius, no : think not, thou noble Roman,
That ever Brutus will go bound to Rome ;
He bears too great a mind."

The parallel passage in Plutarch is as follows :—

"Then Cassius began to speak first, and said—The gods grant us, O Brutus, that this day we may win the field, and ever after to live all the rest of our life quietly, one with another. But sith the gods have so ordained it that the greatest and chiefest things amongst men are most uncertain, and that, if the battle fall out otherwise to-day than we wish or look for, we shall hardly meet again, what art thou then determined to do—to fly, or die ? Brutus answered him, Being yet but a young man, and not over-greatly experienced in the world, I *trust* (I know not how) a certain rule of philosophy, by the which I did greatly blame and reprove Cato for killing of himself, as being no lawful nor godly act touching the gods, nor concerning men valiant, not to give place and yield to Divine Providence, and not constantly and patiently to take whatsoever it pleaseth him to send us, but to draw back and fly : but, being now in the midst of the danger, I am of a contrary mind ;

for, if it be not the will of God that this battle fall out fortunate for us, I will look no more for hope, neither seek to make any new supply of war again, but will rid me of this miserable world, and content me with my fortune."

The critics say that Shakspeare makes Brutus express himself inconsistently. He will await the determination of Providence, but he will not go bound to Rome. Mr. Courtenay explains how "the inconsistency arises from Shakspeare's misreading of the first speech; for Brutus, according to North, referred to his opinion against suicide as one that he had entertained in his youth, but had now abandoned." This writer in a note also explains that the perplexity consists in North saying *I trust*, instead of using the past tense. He then adds,—“Shakspeare's adoption of a version contradicted not only by a passage immediately following, but by the event which he presently portrays, is a striking instance of his careless use of his authorities.”* Very triumphant, no doubt. Most literal critics, why have you not rather confided in Shakspeare than in yourselves? When he deserts Plutarch, he is true to something higher than Plutarch. In Brutus he has drawn a man of speculation; one who is moved to kill the man he loves upon no personal motive, but upon a theory; one who fights his last battle upon somewhat speculative principles; one, however, who, from his gentleness, his constancy, his fortitude, has subdued men of more active minds to the admiration of his temper and to the adoption of his opinions. Cassius never reasons about suicide: it is his instant remedy; a remedy which he rashly adopts, and ruins therefore his own cause. Brutus reasons against it; and he does not revoke his speculative opinions even when the consequences to which they lead are pointed out to him. Is not this nature? and must we be told that this nicety of characterization resulted from Shakspeare carelessly using his authorities; trusting to the false tense of a verb, regardless of the context? “But he contradicts himself,” says the critic, “by the event which he presently portrays.” Most wonderfully has Shakspeare redeemed his own

* ‘Commentaries on the Historical Plays,’ vol. ii. p.255.

consistency. It is when the mind of the speculative man is not only utterly subdued by adverse circumstances, but bowed down before the pressure of supernatural warnings, that he deliberately approaches his last fatal resolve. What is the work of an instant with Cassius is with Brutus a tentative process. Clitus, Dardanius, Volumnius, Strato, are each tried. The irresistible pressure upon his mind, which leads him not to fly with his friends, is the *destiny* which hovers over him:—

“*Bru.* Come hither, good Volumnius: list a word.

Vol. What says my lord?

Bru. Why, this, Volumnius:
The ghost of Cæsar hath appear'd to me
Two several times by night: at Sardis, once;
And, this last night, here in Philippi fields.
I know my hour is come.”

The exclamation of Brutus over the body of Cassius is—

“The last of all the Romans, fare thee well!”

Brutus himself is the last assertor of the old Roman *principles*:—

“This was the noblest Roman of them all:
All the conspirators, save only he,
Did that they did in envy of great Cæsar;
He only, in a general honest thought,
And common good to all, made one of them.”

The scene is changed. The boldest, perhaps the noblest, of the Roman triumvirs has almost forgotten Rome, and governs the Asiatic world with a magnificence equalled only by the voluptuousness into which he is plunged. In Rome, Octavius Cæsar is almost supreme. It is upon the cards which shall govern the *entire* world. The history of *individuals* is henceforth the history of Rome.

“Of all Shakspeare's historical plays,” says Coleridge, “‘Antony and Cleopatra’ is by far the most wonderful.” He again says, assigning it a place even higher than that of being the most wonderful of the *historical* plays, “The highest praise, or rather form of praise, of this play, which I can offer in my own mind, is the doubt which the perusal always occasions in me, whether the ‘Antony and Cleopatra’ is not, in all exhibitions of

a giant power in its strength and vigour of maturity, a formidable rival of 'Macbeth,' 'Lear,' 'Hamlet,' and 'Othello.'"* The epithet "wonderful" is unquestionably the right one to apply to this drama. It is too vast, too gorgeous, to be approached without some prostration of the understanding. It pours such a flood of noonday splendour upon our senses, that we cannot gaze upon it steadily. We have read it again and again; and the impression which it leaves again and again is that of wonder. We can comprehend it, reduce its power to some standard, only by the analysis of *a part*. Mrs. Jameson has adopted this course in one of her most brilliant 'Characteristics of Women.' Treading in her steps timidly, we may venture to attempt a companion sketch to her portrait of Cleopatra. It is in the spirit of the play itself, as the last of the Roman series, that we shall endeavour to follow it, by confining ourselves as much as may be to an *individual*. We use the word in the sense in which Mr. Hare uses it, after some good-natured ridicule of the newspaper "individuals:"—a man "is an individual, so far as he is an integral whole, different and distinct from other men; and that which makes him what he is, that in which he differs and is distinguished from other men, is his individuality, and individualizes him."†

The ANTONY of this play is of course the Antony of 'Julius Cæsar;'—not merely the historical Antony, but the dramatic Antony drawn by the same hand. He is the orator that showed dead Cæsar's mantle to the Roman people; he is the soldier that after his triumph over Brutus said, "This was a man." We have seen something of his character; we have learnt a little of his voluptuousness; we have heard of the "masker and the reveller;" we have beheld the unscrupulous politician. But we cannot think meanly of him. He is one great either for good or for evil. Since he fought at Philippi he has passed through various fortunes: Cæsar thus apostrophizes him:—

"When thou once
Wast beaten from Modena, where thou slew'st
Hirtius and Pansa, consuls, at thy heel

* 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 142.

† 'Guesses at Truth.'

Did Famine follow; whom thou fought'st
against,
Though daintily brought up, with patience
more
Than savages could suffer."

There came an after-time when, at Alexandria,

"Our courteous Antony,
Whom ne'er the word of 'No' woman heard
speak,
Being barber'd ten times o'er, goes to the feast,
And, for his ordinary, pays his heart."

This is the Antony that Shakspeare, in the play before us, brings upon the scene. Rome is to him nothing. He will not hear its ambassadors:—

"There's not a minute of our lives should
stretch
Without some pleasure now."

But "a Roman thought hath struck him." He does hear the messenger. Labienus has overrun Asia. He winces at the thought of his own inertness, but he will know the truth:—

"Speak to me home: mince not the general
tongue."

Another messenger comes. Brief is his news:—

"Fulvia thy wife is dead;"
and brief is the question which follows:—
"Where died she?"

The comment shows the man:—

"There's a great spirit gone: *Thus did I desire it.*"

We learn why he did desire it, in the scene with Cleopatra, in which he announces his departure. Often has he heard, from the same lips, the bitter irony of

"What says *the married woman?*"

He has been bound to Cleopatra not only by her "infinite variety," but by her caprice and her force of ridicule. His moral power is as weak as his physical courage is strong. Cleopatra paints the magnificent soldier and the infatuated lover in a few words:—

"The demi-Atlas of this earth, the arm
And burgonet of men. He's speaking now,

Or murmuring 'Where's my *serpent* of old Nile?'

For so he calls me."

He has fled from Cleopatra, but he sends her his messenger:—

"All the east,
Say thou, shall call her mistress."

In this temper he meets Cæsar, and he marries Octavia.

The interview between Antony and Cæsar is most masterly. The constrained courtesy on each side—the coldness of Cæsar—the frank apologies of Antony—the suggestion of Agrippa, so opportune, and yet apparently so unpremeditated—the ready assent of Antony—all this—matter for rhetorical flourishes of at least five hundred lines in the hands of an ordinary dramatist—may be read without a start or an elevation of the voice. It is solid business throughout. Antony, we might think, was a changed man. Enobarbus, who knows him, is of a different opinion. Wonderfully has he described Cleopatra; and when Mecænas says,

"Now Antony must leave her utterly,"

the answer is prophetic:—

"Never; he will not:

Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety"

Against this power Enobarbus knows that the "beauty, wisdom, modesty," of Octavia will be a fragile bond. And Antony knows this himself. He knows this while he protests,

"I have not kept my square; but that to come
Shall all be done by the rule."

And yet he is not wholly a dissembler. Shakspeare has most skilfully introduced the soothsayer, at the moment when Antony's moral weakness appears to have put on some show of strength. He found the incident in Plutarch; but he has made his own application of it:—

"Be it art, or hap,
He hath spoken true: The very dice obey him;

And in our sports my better cunning faints
Under his chance: if we draw lots, he speeds:

His cocks do win the battle still of mine,
When it is all to nought; and his quails ever
Beat mine, inhoop'd, at odds."

Therefore,

"I will to Egypt."

To establish an independent throne?—to intrench himself against the power of Augustus in an Asiatic empire? No.

"And though I make this marriage for my peace,

I' the east my pleasure lies."

The reckless short-sighted voluptuary was never drawn more truly. His entire policy is shaped by his passion. The wonderful scene in which his marriage with Octavia is made known to Cleopatra assures us that in the extremest intemperance of self-will he will have his equal. Cleopatra would have Antony unmarried,

"So half my Egypt were submerged, and made
A cistern for scaled snakes."

According to Enobarbus, the unmarrying will scarcely be necessary for her gratification:—

"*Eno.* Octavia is of a holy, cold, and still conversation.

Men. Who would not have his wife so?

Eno. Not he, that himself is not so; which is Mark Antony."

The drinking scene between the Triumvirs and Pompey is one of those creations which render Shakspeare so entirely above, and so utterly unlike, other poets. Every line is a trait of character. We here see the solemn "unmeritable" Lepidus; the cautious Cæsar; the dashing, clever, genial Antony. His eye dances; his whole visage "doth cream and mantle;" the corners of his mouth are drawn down, as he hoaxes Lepidus with the most admirable fooling:—

"*Lep.* What manner o' thing is your crocodile?

Ant. It is shaped, sir, like itself; and it is as broad as it hath breadth: it is just so high as it is, and moves with its own organs," &c.

"*Lep.* 'T is a strange serpent."

The revelry grows louder and louder, till "the Egyptian bacchanals" close the scene.

Who can doubt that Antony bears "the holding" the loudest of all?—

"As loud
As his strong sides can volley."

These are not the lords of the world of the French tragedy. Grimm, who, upon the whole, has a leaning to Shakspeare, says—"Il est assez ridicule sans doute de faire parler les valets comme les héros; mais il est beaucoup *plus ridicule encore* de faire parler aux héros le langage du peuple."* To make them drunk is worse even than the worst of the ridiculous. It is impossible to define such a sin. We think, with Dogberry, it is "flat burglary as ever was committed." Upton has a curious theory, which would partly make Shakspeare belong to the French school. The hero of this play, according to this theory, does not speak "the language of the people." Upton says—"Mark Antony, as Plutarch informs us, affected the Asiatic manner of speaking, which much resembled his own temper, being ambitious, unequal, and very rhodomontade. * * * * *

This style our poet has very artfully and learnedly interspersed in Antony's speeches."† Unquestionably the language of Antony is more elevated than that of Enobarbus, for example. Antony was of the poetical temperament—a man of high genius—an orator, who could move the passions dramatically—a lover, that knew no limits to his devotion, because he loved imaginatively. When sorrow falls upon him, the poetical parts of his character are more and more developed; we forget the sensualist. But, even before the touch of grief has somewhat exalted his nature, he takes the poetical view of poetical things. What can be more exquisite than his mention of Octavia's weeping at the parting with her brother?—

"The April's in her eyes: it is love's spring,
And these the showers to bring it on."

And, higher still:—

"Her tongue will not obey her heart, nor can
Her heart inform her tongue: the swan's down
feather,

* 'Correspondance Littéraire, Troisième Partie,' tome i. p. 129.

† 'Critical Observations,' p. 100.

That stands upon the swell at the full of tide,
And neither way inclines."

This, we think, is not "the Asiatic manner of speaking."

Cold is Antony's parting with Octavia:—

"Choose your own company, and command
what cost

Your heart has mind to."

Rapid is his meeting with Cleopatra. She "hath nodded him to her." The voluptuary has put on his Eastern magnificence:—

"I' the market-place, on a tribunal silver'd,
Cleopatra and himself in chairs of gold
Were publicly enthroned."

He rejects all counsel:—"I'll fight at sea."
And so

"The greater cantle of the world is lost
With very ignorance."

Now comes the generosity of his character—of the same growth as his magnificence and recklessness. He exhorts his friends to take his treasure and fly to Cæsar. His self-abasement is most profound:—

"I have offended reputation."

But he has not yet learnt wisdom. Cleopatra is present, and then—

"Fall not a tear, I say; one of them rates
All that is won and lost: Give me a kiss;
Even this repays me."

He then becomes a braggart; he will challenge Cæsar, "sword against sword." Profound is the comment of Enobarbus:—

"I see, men's judgments are
A parcel of their fortunes; and things outward
Do draw the inward quality after them,
To suffer all alike."

Cæsar's ambassador comes to Cleopatra. He tempts her;—and it almost looks as if she yielded to the temptation. He kisses her hand, at the instant Antony enters:—

"Moon and stars!

Whip him."

This is partly jealousy; partly the assertion of small power by one accustomed to unlimited command. Truly Enobarbus says—

"T is better playing with a lion's whelp,
Than with an old one dying."

Shakspeare makes this man the interpreter of his own wisdom :—

“ I see still,
A diminution in our captain's brain
Restores his heart: When valour preys on
reason,
It eats the sword it fights with. I will seek
Some way to leave him.”

Enobarbus *does* leave him. But he first witnesses

“ One of those odd tricks which sorrow shoots
Out of the mind.”

Antony puts forth the poetry of his nature in his touching words to his followers, ending in

“ Let 's to supper; come,
And drown consideration.”

When he hears of the treachery of Enobarbus, he again tasks the generosity of his spirit to the utmost :—

“ Go, Eros, send his treasure after; do it;
Detain no jot, I charge thee.”

He has driven Cæsar “to his camp.” All Cleopatra's tresspass is forgotten in one burst of enthusiasm :—

“ My nightingale,
We have beat them to their beds. What, girl?
though gray
Do something mingle with our younger brown;
Yet ha' we a brain that nourishes our nerves,
And can get goal for goal of youth.”

Another day comes, and it brings another note :—

“ All is lost;
This foul Egyptian hath betrayed me.”
Cleopatra says truly—

“ He is more mad
Than Telamon for his shield.”

The scene which terminates with Antony falling on his sword is in the highest style of the great dramatist,—and that is to give the highest praise. Hazlitt has eloquently said of its magnificent opening—“This is, without doubt, one of the finest pieces of poetry in Shakspeare. The splendour of the imagery, the semblance of reality, the lofty range of picturesque objects hanging over the world, their evanescent nature, the total uncer-

tainty of what is left behind, are just like the mouldering schemes of human greatness.” But, be it observed, the poetry is all in keeping with the character of the man. Let us once more repeat it :—

“ *Ant.* Eros, thou yet behold'st me.

Eros. Ay, noble lord.

Ant. Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish :

A vapour, sometime, like a bear, or lion,
A tower'd citadel, a pendant rock,
A forked mountain, or blue promontory
With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world,
And mock our eyes with air: thou hast seen
these signs;

They are black vesper's pageants.

Eros. Ay, my lord.

Ant. That which is now a horse, even with
a thought

The rack dislimbs; and makes it indistinct,
As water is in water.

Eros. It does, my lord.

Ant. My good knave, Eros, now thy captain is

Even such a body; here I am Antony;
Yet cannot hold this visible shape, my knave.”

The images describe the Antony melting into nothingness; but the splendour of the imagery is the reflection of Antony's mind, which, thus enshrined in poetry, can never become “indistinct,”—will always “hold this visible shape.” Dryden has also tried to produce a poetical Antony, precisely under the same circumstances. We transcribe a passage :—

“ *Ant.* My eyes
Are open to her falsehood: my whole life
Has been a golden dream of Love and Friend-
ship.

But, now I wake, I'm like a merchant, roused
From soft repose, to see his vessel sinking,
And all his wealth cast o'er. Ingrateful
woman!

Who follow'd me, but as the swallow summer,
Hatching her young ones in my kindly beams,
Singing her flatteries to my morning wake;
But, now my winter comes, she spreads her
wings,
And seeks the spring of Cæsar.”

All for Love, Act V.

We hasten to the end. The magnificence

of Antony's character breathes out of his parting spirit:—

“The miserable change now at my end,
Lament nor sorrow at: but please your
thoughts,
In feeding them with those my former fortunes

Wherein I liv'd, the greatest prince o' the
world,

The noblest: and do now not basely die,
Nor cowardly put off my helmet to
My countryman,—A ROMAN, BY A ROMAN
VALIANTLY VANQUISHED.”

BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I.

THE DRAMATISTS OF SHAKSPERE'S THIRD PERIOD.

IN the Address to the Reader prefixed to the first edition, published in 1612, of 'The White Devil, or Vittoria Corombona,' of JOHN WEBSTER, is the following passage:—

“Detraction is the sworn friend to ignorance: for mine own part, I have ever truly cherished my good opinions of other men's worthy labours, especially of that full and heightened style of Master Chapman; the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson; the no less worthy composures of the both worthily excellent Master Beaumont and Master Fletcher; and lastly (without wrong last to be named), the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood, wishing what I write may be read by their light; protesting that, in the strength of mine own judgment, I know them so worthy, that though I rest silent in my own work, yet to most of theirs I dare (without flattery) fix that of Martial:—

‘Non norunt hæc monumenta mori.’”

Webster was formed upon Shakspeare. He had no pretensions to the inexhaustible wit, the all-penetrating humour of his master; but he had the power of approaching the terrible energy of his passion, and the profoundness of his pathos, in characters which he took out of the great muster-roll of humanity,

and placed in fearful situations, and sometimes with revolting imaginings almost beyond humanity. Those who talk of the carelessness of Shakspeare may be surprised to find that his praise is that of a “right happy and copious industry.” It is clear what dramatic writers were the objects of Webster's love. He did not aspire to the “full and heightened style of Master Chapman,” nor would his genius be shackled by the examples of “the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson.” He belonged to the school of the romantic dramatists. Master Beaumont and Master Fletcher are “worthily excellent;” but his aspiration was to imitate “the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakespeare, Master Dekker, and Master Heywood, wishing what I write may be read by their light.” There were critics at that time who regarded the romantic drama as a diversion for the multitude only; and Webster thinks it necessary to apologize for this deliberate choice—“Willingly, and not ignorantly, in this kind have I faulted.” He says—“If it be objected this is no true dramatic poem, I shall easily confess it, non potes in nugas dicere plura meas, ipse ego quam dixi; willingly, and not ignorantly, in this kind have I faulted: for should a man present, to such an auditory, the most sententious

tragedy that was ever written, observing all the critical laws, as height of style, and gravity of person, enrich it with the sententious Chorus, and, as it were, 'liven death, in the passionate and weighty Nuntias; yet, after all this divine rapture, O dura messorum ilia, the breath that comes from the incapable multitude is able to poison it; and, ere it be acted, let the author resolve to fix to every scene this of Horace—

'Hæc porcis hodie comedenda relinques.'"

As early as 1602, Webster was a writer for Henslow's theatre, in conjunction with Dekker, Drayton, Middleton, Chettle, Heywood, and Wentworth Smith. At a later period he was more directly associated with Dekker alone. His great tragedies of 'The White Devil' and 'The Duchess of Malfi' were produced at the period when Shakspeare had almost ceased to write; and it is probably to this circumstance we owe these original and unaided efforts of Webster's genius. There was a void to be filled up, and it was filled up worthily.

Webster has placed his coadjutor DEKKER next to Shakspeare. He looked upon the world with an observant eye; and of him it has been said, that his "pamphlets and plays alone would furnish a more complete view of the habits and customs of his contemporaries in vulgar and middle life than could easily be collected from all the grave annals of the times."* He was confident in his powers; and claimed to be a satirist by as indefeasible a title as that of his greater rival Jonson:—"I am snake-proof; and though, with Hannibal, you bring whole hogsheads of vinegar-railings, it is impossible for you to quench or come over my Alpine resolution. I will sail boldly and desperately amongst the shores of the isle of Gulls; and in defiance of those terrible block-houses, their loggerheads, make a true discovery of their wild yet habitable country."† Thomas Dekker is certainly one of those who gather humours from all men; but his wit is not of the highest or the most delicate character. He knows the town, and he makes the most of

his knowledge. Though he is a "high flyer in wit," as Edward Phillips calls him, yet is he a poet. As he advanced in years, he was wielding greater powers, and dealing with nobler things, than belonged to the satirist. In his higher walk he is of the school of nature and simplicity. Hazlitt speaks of one of his plays, perhaps the best, with true artistical feeling:—"The rest of the character is answerable to the beginning. The execution is, throughout, as exact as the conception is new and masterly. There is the least colour possible used; the pencil drags; the canvas is almost seen through: but then, what precision of outline, what truth and purity of tone, what firmness of hand, what marking of character! It is as if there were some fine art to chisel thought, and to embody the inmost movements of the mind in every-day actions and familiar speech."* Dekker acquired some of his satirical propensities, but the tenderness of his heart was also called forth, in the crooked ways and dark places of misfortune. Almost the first record of his life is a memorandum by Henslow of the loan of forty shillings, "to discharge Mr. Dicker out of the Counter in the Poultry." Oldys, in his manuscript notes upon Langbaine, affirms that he was in the King's Bench Prison from 1613 to 1616. His own calamities furnish a commentary to the tenderness of many such passages as the following, in which a father is told of the miseries of his erring daughter:—

"I'm glad you are wax, not marble; you are made

Of man's best temper; there are now good hopes

That all these heaps of ice about your heart,
By which a father's love was frozen up,
Are thaw'd in these sweet show'rs fetch'd
from your eyes:

We are ne'er like angels till our passion dies.
She is not dead, but lives under worse fate;
I think she's poor."

The praise of industry belongs to Dekker, though its fruits were poverty. He lived to a considerable age, and he laboured to the last at play or pamphlet. But the amount

* 'Quarterly Review.'

† 'Gull's Hornbook.'

* 'Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth.'

of his productions becomes almost insignificant when compared with the more than "copious industry" of THOMAS HEYWOOD. He was a scholar, having been educated at Cambridge—at Peterhouse, it is said; but he became an actor as early as 1598, being then a sharer in Henslow's company. In 1633 he claimed for himself the authorship, entirely or in part, of two hundred and twenty dramas. Many of his two hundred and twenty dramas were probably such short pieces as 'The Yorkshire Tragedy.' Heywood had the power of stirring the affections, of moving pity and terror by true representations of the course of crime and misery in real life. Charles Lamb has summed up the character of his writings in three lines:—"Heywood is a sort of prose Shakspeare. His scenes are to the full as natural and affecting. But we miss the poet, that which in Shakspeare always appears out and above the surface of the nature." Winstanley, not a very trustworthy authority, speaking of Heywood's wonderful fertility, says—"He not only acted himself almost every day, but also wrote each day a sheet; and that he might lose no time, many of his plays were composed in the tavern, on the back side of tavern bills; which may be an occasion that so many of them are lost."

FRANCIS BEAUMONT was a boy at the period to which our slight notice of his great coadjutor Fletcher belongs*. The poetical union of Beaumont and Fletcher has given birth to stories, such as Aubrey delights in telling, that their friendship extended even to a community of lodging and clothes, with others matters in common that are held to belong to the perfection of the social system. We neither believe these things entirely, nor do we quite receive the assertion of Dr. Earle, that Beaumont's "main business was to correct the overflowings of Mr. Fletcher's wit." Edward Phillips repeats this assertion. They first came before the world in the association of a title-page in 1607. The junior always preceded the elder poet in such announcements of their works; and this was probably determined by the alphabetical arrangement. We have many

indications that Beaumont was regarded by his contemporaries as a man of great and original power. It was not with the exaggeration of a brother's love that Sir John Beaumont wrote his affecting epitaph upon the death of Francis:—

"Thou shouldst have follow'd me, but death
to blame

Miscounted years, and measur'd age by fame."

He was buried by the side of Chaucer and Spenser, in the hallowed earth where it was wished that Shakspeare should have been laid:—

"Renowned Spenser, lie a thought more nigh
To learned Chaucer; and, rare Beaumont, lie
A little nearer Spenser, to make room
For Shakespear in your threefold, fourfold
tomb.

To lodge all four in one bed make a shift,
For until doomsday hardly will a fifth,
Betwixt this day and that, by fates be slain,
For whom your curtains need be drawn
again." *

When Shakspeare's company performed at Wilton, in December, 1603, it is more than probable that there was a young man present at those performances, whose course of life might have been determined by the impulses of those festive hours. PHILIP MASSINGER, who in 1603 was nineteen years of age, was the son of a gentleman filling a service of trust in the household of the Earls of Pembroke. At this period Philip was a commoner of St. Alban Hall, Oxford. "Being sufficiently famed for several specimens of wit, he betook himself to making plays." This is Anthony Wood's account of the dedication of Massinger to a pursuit which brought him little but hopeless poverty. Amongst Henslow's papers was found an undated letter, addressed to him by Nathaniel Field, with postscripts signed by Robert Daborne and Philip Massinger. Malone conjectures that the letter was written between 1612 and 1615, Henslow having died in January, 1616. The letter, which is a melancholy illustration of the oft-told tale of the misfortunes of genius, was first given in the additions to Malone's 'Historical Account of the English Stage':—

* Book vi. chap. i. page 264.

* 'Elegy on Shakespear, by W. Basse.

"To our most loving friend, Mr. Philip Hinchlow,
Esquire, These.

"Mr. Hinchlow,

"You understand our unfortunate extremity, and I do not think you so void of Christianity but that you would throw so much money into the Thames as we request now of you, rather than endanger so many innocent lives. You know there is x*l*. more at least to be received of you for the play. We desire you to lend us v*l*. of that; which shall be allowed to you; without which we cannot be bailed, nor I play any more till this be dispatched. It will lose you xx*l*. ere the end of the next week, besides the hinderance of the next new play. Pray, Sir, consider our cases with humanity, and now give us cause to acknowledge you our true friend in time of need. We have entreated Mr. Davison to deliver this note, as well to witness your love as our promises, and always acknowledgment to be ever

"Your most thankful and loving friends,

"NAT. FIELD.

"The money shall be abated out of the money remains for the play of Mr. Fletcher and ours.

"ROBERT DABORNE.

"I have ever found you a true loving friend to me, and in so small a suit, it being honest, I hope you will not fail us.

"PHILIP MASSINGER."

By an indorsement on the letter it is shown that Henslow made the advance which these unfortunate men required. But how was it that Massinger, who was brought up under the patronage of a family distinguished for their encouragement of genius, was doomed to struggle with abject penury? * Gifford conjectures that he became a Roman Catholic early in life, and thus gave offence to the noble family with whom his father had been so intimately connected. In 1623 Massinger published his 'Bondman,' dedicating it to the second of the Herberts, Philip, Earl of Montgomery. The dedication shows that he had been an alien from the house in the service of which his father lived

* In Mr. Collier's 'Memoirs of Actors' the fact of Massinger's burial at St. Saviour's church, in 1639, being recorded as that of 'Philip Masenger, *stranger*,' is not regarded as any indication of his poverty and loneliness: "Every person, there interred, who did not belong to the parish, was called a stranger." The payment of 2*l*. for expenses would show "that Massinger was interred with peculiar cost and ceremony."

and died: "However I could never arrive at the happiness to be made known to your Lordship, yet a desire, born with me, to make a tender of all duties and service to the noble family of the Herberts descended to me as an inheritance from my dead father, Arthur Massinger. Many years he happily spent in the service of your honourable house, and died a servant to it." There is something unintelligible in all this; though we may well believe with Gifford that, "whatever might be the unfortunate circumstance which deprived the author of the patronage and protection of the elder branch of the Herberts, he did not imagine it to be of a disgraceful nature; or he would not, in the face of the public, have appealed to his connexions with the family." * It is difficult to trace the course of Massinger's poetical life. 'The Virgin Martyr,' in which he was assisted by Dekker, was the first printed of his plays; and that did not appear till 1622. But there can be little doubt that it belongs to an earlier period; for in 1620 a fee was paid to the Master of the Revels on the occasion of "New reforming The Virgin Martyr." The 'Bondman' was printed within a year after it was produced upon the stage; and from that period till the time of his death several of his plays were published, but at very irregular intervals. It would appear that during the early portion of his career Massinger was chiefly associated with other writers. To the later period belong his great works, such as 'The Duke of Milan,' 'The City Madam,' and the 'New Way to pay Old Debts.' Taken altogether, Massinger was perhaps the worthiest successor of Shakspeare; and this indeed is praise enough.

NAT. FIELD, the writer of the letter to Henslow, was a player, as we learn by that letter. The same document shows that he was a player in the service of Henslow. But he is mentioned in the first folio edition of Shakspeare's plays, as one of the principal actors in them. The best evidence of the genius of Field is his association with Massinger in the noble play of 'The Fatal Dowry.' He probably was not connected with Shakspeare's company during Shakspeare's

* Introduction to the Works of Massinger.

life; but he is named in a patent to the actors at the Blackfriars and Globe in 1620. Robert Daborne, who was associated with Field and Massinger in their "extremity," was either at this period, or subsequently, in holy orders.

THOMAS MIDDLETON was a contemporary of Shakspeare. We find him early associated with other writers, and in 1602 was published his comedy of 'Blurt Master-Constable.' Edward Phillips describes him as "a copious writer for the English stage, contemporary with Jonson and Fletcher, though not of equal repute, and yet on the other side not altogether contemptible." He continued to write on till the suppression of the theatres,

and the opinion of Phillips was the impression as to his powers at the period of the Restoration. Ford,—who has truly been called "of the first order of poets"—Rowley, Wilson, Hathway, Porter, Houghton, Day, Tourneur, Taylor, arose as the day-star of Shakspeare was setting. Each might have been remarkable in an age of mediocrity, some are still illustrious. The great dramatic literature of England was the creation of half a century only; and in that short space was heaped up such a prodigality of riches that we regard this wondrous accumulation with something too much of indifference to the lesser gems, dazzled by the lustre of the

"One entire and perfect chrysolite."

CHAPTER II.

THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN.

THE title-page of the original edition of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' sets forth that it was "written by the memorable worthies of their time, Mr. John Fletcher and Mr. William Shakspeare." This was printed in 1634, nine years after the death of Fletcher, and eighteen years after the death of Shakspeare. The play was not printed in the first collected edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's works, in 1647, for the reason assigned in the 'Stationers' Address.' "Some plays, you know, written by these authors, were heretofore printed: I thought not convenient to mix them with this volume, which of itself is entirely new." The title-page of the quarto of 1634 is, therefore, the only direct external evidence we possess as to Shakspeare's participation in this play. Nor have we to offer any contemporary notice of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' which refers to this question of the co-authorship. The very prologue and epilogue of the play itself are silent upon this point. They are, except in a passage or two, unimportant in themselves; have no poetical merit; and present some of those loose allusions which, as we approach the days when principles of morality came

into violent conflict, rendered the stage so justly obnoxious to the Puritans. The prologue, speaking of the play, says—

"It has a noble breeder, and a pure,
A learned, and a poet never went
More famous yet 'twixt Po and silver Trent:
Chaucer (of all admired) the story gives;
There constant to eternity it lives!"

And it then adds:—

"If we let fall the nobleness of this,
And the first sound this child hear be a hiss,
How will it shake the bones of that good
man,
And make him cry from under-ground, 'Oh,
fan
From me the witless chaff of *such a writer*
That blasts my bays, and my famed works
makes lighter
Than Robin Hood?'"

The expression "such a writer" is almost evidence against the double authorship. It implies, too, that, if Fletcher were the author, the play was presented before his death; for if the players had produced the drama after his death, they would have probably spoken of him (he being its sole author) in the terms

of eulogy with which they accompanied the performance of 'The Loyal Subject :—

"We need not, noble gentlemen, to invite
Attention, pre-instruct you who did write
This worthy story, being confident
The mirth join'd with grave matter and
intent
To yield the hearers profit with delight,
Will speak the maker : And to do him right
Would ask a genius like to his ; the age
Mourning his loss, and our now-widow'd stage
In vain lamenting."

The inferences, therefore, to be deduced from the prologue to 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' (supposing Fletcher to be concerned in this drama),—that it was acted during his life-time, and that he either claimed the sole authorship, or suppressed all mention of the joint-authorship,—are to be weighed against the assertion of the title-page, that it was "written by the two memorable worthies of their time." We are thrown upon the examination of the internal evidence, then, without any material bias from the publication of the play, or its stage representation.

Before the first builders-up of that wondrous edifice, the English drama, lay the whole world of classical and romantic fable, "where to choose." One of the earliest, and consequently least skilful, of those workmen, Richard Edwards, went to the ancient stores for his 'Damon and Pythias,' and to Chaucer for his 'Palamon and Arcyte.' We learn from Wood's MSS. that when Elizabeth visited Oxford, in 1566, "at night the Queen heard the first part of an English play, named 'Palæmon, or Palamon Arcyte,' made by Mr. Richard Edwards, a gentleman of her chapel, acted with very great applause in Christ Church Hall." An accident happened at the beginning of the play by the falling of a stage, through which three persons were killed—a scholar of St. Mary's Hall, and two who were probably more missed, a college brewer and a cook. The mirth, however, went on, and "afterwards the actors performed their parts so well, that the Queen laughed heartily thereat, and gave the author of the play great thanks for

his pains."* It is clear that the fable of Chaucer must have been treated in a different manner by Edwards than we find it treated in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen.' We have another record of a play on a similar subject. In Henslow's 'Diary' we have an entry, under the date of September 1594, of 'Palamon and Arsett' being acted four times. It is impossible to imagine that 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' is the same play. Here, then, was a subject adapted to a writer who worked in the spirit in which Shakspeare almost uniformly worked. It was familiar to the people in their popular poetry; it was familiar to the stage. To arrive at a right judgment regarding the authorship of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen,' we must examine the play line by line in its relation to 'The Knight's Tale' of Chaucer.

'The Knight's Tale' opens with the return to Athens of the "duke that highté Theseus" after he had

"conquer'd all the regne of Feminie,
That whilom was ycleped Scythia,
And wedded the freshe queen Hypolita,
And brought her home with him to his coun-
trei
With muchel glory and great solempnitie,
And eke her youngé sister Emelie."

'The Two Noble Kinsmen' opens with Theseus at Athens, in the company of Hippolyta and her sister, proceeding to the celebration of his marriage with the "dreaded Amazonian." Their bridal procession is interrupted by the

"three queens whose sovereigns fell before
The wrath of cruel Creon."

In Chaucer the suppliants are a more numerous company. As Theseus was approaching Athens,

"He was 'ware, as he cast his eye aside,
Where that there kneeled in the highé way
A company of ladies tway and tway,
Each after other, clad in clothés black ;
But such a cry and such a woe they make,
That in this world n'is creature living
That ever heard such another waimenting."

Briefly they tell their tale of woe, and as

* Nichols's 'Progresses of Queen Elizabeth,' vol. i. pp. 210, 211.

rapidly does the chivalrous duke resolve to avenge their wrongs:—

“And right anon, withouten more abode,
His banner he display'd, and forth he rode
To Thebes ward, and all his host beside.”

The Queen and her sister remained at Athens. Out of this rapid narration, which occupies little more than a hundred lines in Chaucer, has the first scene of ‘The Two Noble Kinsmen’ been constructed. Assuredly, the reader who opens that scene for the first time will feel that he has lighted upon a work of no ordinary power. The mere interruption of the bridal procession by the widowed queens—the contrast of their black garments and their stained veils with the white robes and wheaten chaplets and hymeneal songs with which the play opens—is a noble dramatic conception; but the poet, whoever he be, possesses that command of appropriate language which realizes all that the imagination can paint of a dramatic situation and movement; there is nothing shadowy or indistinct, no vague explanations, no trivial epithets. When the First Queen says—

“Oh, pity, duke!
Thou purger of the earth, draw thy fear'd
sword
That does good turns to the world; give us
the bones
Of our dead kings, that we may *chapel* them!”

we know that the thoughts which belong to her condition are embodied in words of no common significance. When the Second Queen, addressing Hippolyta, “the soldieress,” says,—

“*Speak't in a woman's key*, like such a woman
As any of us three; weep ere you fail;
Lend us a knee;
But touch the ground for us no longer time
*Than a dove's motion, when the head's pluck'd
off!*”

we feel that the poet not only wields his harmonious language with the decision of a practised artist, but exhibits the nicer touches which attest his knowledge of natural feelings, and employs images which, however strange and unfamiliar, are so true that we wonder they never occurred to us before,

but at the same time so original that they appear to defy copying or imitation. The whole scene is full of the same remarkable word-painting. There is another quality which it exhibits, which is also peculiar to the highest order of minds—the ability to set us thinking—to excite that just and appropriate reflection which might arise of itself out of the exhibition of deep passions and painful struggles and resolute self-denials, but which the true poet breathes into us without an effort, so as to give the key to our thoughts, but utterly avoiding those sententious moralizings which are sometimes deemed to be the province of tragedy. When the Queens commend the surrender which Theseus makes of his affections to a sense of duty, the poet gives us the philosophy of such heroism in a dozen words spoken by Theseus:—

“*As we are men,*
Thus should we do; *being sensually subdued,*
We lose our humane title.”

The first appearance, in Chaucer, of Palamon and Arcite is when they lie wounded on the battle-field of Thebes. In ‘The Two Noble Kinsmen’ the necessary conduct of the story, as a drama, requires that the principal personages should be exhibited to us before they become absorbed in the main action. It is on such occasions as these that a dramatist of the highest order makes his characters reveal themselves, naturally and without an effort; and yet so distinctly that their individual identity is impressed upon the mind, so as to combine with the subsequent movement of the plot. The second scene of ‘The Two Noble Kinsmen’ appears to us somewhat deficient in this power. It is written with great energy; but the two friends are energetic alike: we do not precisely see which is the more excitable, the more daring, the more resolved, the more generous. We could change the names of the speakers without any material injury to the propriety of what they speak. Take, as an opposite example, Hermia and Helena, in ‘A Midsummer Night's Dream,’ where the differences of character scarcely required to be so nicely defined. And yet in *description*

the author of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' makes Palamon and Arcite essentially different:—

"Arcite is gently visaged: yet his eye
Is like an engine bent, or a sharp weapon
In a soft sheath; mercy and manly courage
Are bedfellows in his visage. Palamon
Has a most menacing aspect; his brow
Is graved, and seems to bury what it frowns
on;
Yet sometimes 't is not so, but alters to
The quality of his thoughts; long time his
eye
Will dwell upon his object; melancholy
Becomes him nobly; so does Arcite's mirth;
But Palamon's sadness is a kind of mirth,
So mingled, as if mirth did make him sad,
And sadness, merry; those darker humours,
that
Stick misbecomingly on others, on him
Live in fair dwelling."

This is noble writing; and it is quite sufficient to enable the stage representation of the two characters to be well defined. Omit it, and omit the recollections of it in the reading, and we doubt greatly whether the characters themselves realize this description: they are not self-evolved and manifested. The third scene, also, is a dramatic addition to the tale of Chaucer. It keeps the interest concentrated upon Hippolyta, and, especially, Emilia; it is not essential to the action, but it is a graceful addition to it. It has the merit, too, of developing the character of Emilia, and so to reconcile us to the apparent coldness with which she is subsequently content to receive the triumphant rival, whichever he be, as her husband. The Queen and her sister talk of the friendship of Theseus and Perithous. Emilia tells the story of her own friendship, to prove

"That the true love 'tween maid and maid
may be
More than in sex dividual."

This, in some sort, modifies the subsequent position of Emilia, "bride-habited, but maiden-hearted." Her description of her early friendship has been compared to the celebrated passage in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream':—

"Is all the counsel that we two have shared," &c.

Seward, the editor of Beaumont and Fletcher, makes this comparison, and prefers the description in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen.' Weber assents to this preference. We have no hesitation in believing the passage in the play before us to be an imitation of the passage in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream,' and therefore inferior in quality; we do not think that Shakspeare would thus have repeated himself. Our readers shall judge:—

"*Emi.* I was acquainted
Once with a time, when I enjoy'd a play-fellow;
You were at wars when she the grave enrich'd,
Who made too proud the bed, took leave o' th' moon,
(Which then look'd pale at parting), when our count
Was each eleven.

Hip. 'Twas Flavina.

Emi. Yes.
You talk of Perithous' and Theseus' love;
Theirs has more ground, is more maturely season'd,
More buckled with strong judgment, and their needs
The one of th' other may be said to water
Their intertangled roots of love; but I
And she (I sigh and spoke of) were things innocent,
Loved for we did, and like the elements
That know not what, nor why, yet do effect
Rare issues by their operance; our souls
Did so to one another: what she liked
Was then of me approved; what not, condemn'd,
No more arraignment; the flower that I
would pluck

And put between my breasts (oh, then but beginning
To swell about the blossom), she would long
Till she had such another, and commit it
To the like innocent cradle, where phoenix-like

They died in perfume: on my head no toy
But was her pattern; her affections (pretty,
Though happily her careless wear) I follow'd
For my most serious decking; had mine ear
Stol'n some new air, or at adventure humm'd
one

From musical coinage, why, it was a note

Whereon her spirits would sojourn (rather dwell on),
And sing it in her slumbers: this rehearsal,
Which, every innocent wots well, comes in
Like old importment's bastard, has this end,
That the true love 'tween maid and maid
may be
More than in sex dividual.

Hip. You're out of breath;
And this high speeded pace is but to say,
That you shall never, like the maid Flavina,
Love any that's call'd man.

Emi. I am sure I shall not."

In Chaucer, Theseus makes swift work
with Creon and with Thebes:—

"With Creon, which that was of Thebés king,
He fought, and slew him manly as a knight
In plain bataille, and put his folk to flight;
And by assault he won the city after,
And rent adown both wall, and spar, and
rafter;
And to the ladies he restored again
The bodies of their husbands that were slain,
To do th' obsequies, as was then the guise."

It is in the battle-field that Palamon and
Arcite are discovered wounded:—

"Not fully quick ne fully dead they were,
But by their cote-armure and by their gear
The heralds knew them well in special."

The incident is literally followed in the
play, where the herald says, in answer to
the question of Theseus, "They are not
dead:—"

"Nor in a state of life: had they been taken
When their last hurts were given, 't was pos-
sible
They might have been recover'd; yet they
breathe,
And have the name of men."

In Chaucer, Theseus is to the heroic friends
a merciless conqueror:—

"He full soon them sent
To Athenes, for to dwellen in prison
Perpetual, he n'oldé no ransom."

But in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' he would
appear to exhibit himself as a generous foe,
who, having accomplished the purposes of
his expedition, has no enmity with the
honest defenders of their country:—

"The very lees of such, millions of rates
Exceed the wine of others; all our surgeons
Convent in their behoof; our richest balms,
Rather than niggard, waste! their lives con-
cern us
Much more than Thebes is worth."

The fifth scene of 'The Two Noble Kins-
men' is a scenic expansion of a short pas-
sage in Chaucer:—

"But it were all too long for to devise
The greaté clamour and the waimenting,
Which that the ladies made at the brenning
Of the bodies."

The epigrammatic ending of the scene is
perhaps familiar to many:—

"The world's a city full of straying streets;
And death's the market-place, where each
one meets."

Pursuing the plan with which we set out,
of following the course of Chaucer's story,
we pass over all those scenes and parts of
scenes which may be called the underplot.
Such in the second act is the beginning of
Scene I. In Chaucer we learn that—

"In a tow'r, in anguish and in woe,
Dwellen this Palamon and eke Arcite
For evermore, there may no gold them quite."

The old romantic poet reserves his dialogue
for the real business of the story, when the
two friends, each seeing Emilia from the
prison-window, become upon the instant
defying rivals for her love. This incident is
not managed with more preparation by the
dramatist; but the prelude to it exhibits
the two young men consoling each other
under their adverse fortune, and making
resolutions of eternal friendship. It is in
an attentive perusal of this dialogue that
we begin to discover that portions even of
the great incidents of the drama have been
written by different persons; or that, if
written by one and the same person, they
have been composed upon different prin-
ciples of art. In 1833 appeared a little work
of great ability, entitled, 'A Letter on Shak-
speare's Authorship of The Two Noble Kins-
men.' The writer of that letter is understood
to be the accomplished professor of logic and
rhetoric in the University of St. Andrews,

William Spalding, Esq.; and, although we have reason to believe that his opinions on this particular question have undergone some change or modification, it would be unjust, not only to the author, but to our readers, not to notice with more than common respect the opinions of a writer who, although then a very young man, displayed a power of analysis and discrimination which marked him as belonging to a high school of criticism. Mr. Spalding assumes that a considerable portion of this drama was unquestionably the production of Shakspeare; that the under-plot was entirely by a different hand; but that the same hand, which was that of Fletcher, was also engaged in producing some of the higher scenes of the main action. The whole of the first act, according to the traditional opinion, he holds to have been written by Shakspeare. The dialogue before us in the first scene of the second act, and the subsequent contest for the love of Emilia, he assigns to Fletcher. Our readers will not regret the length of our extract:—

Pal. How do you, noble cousin?

Arc. How do you, sir?

Pal. Why, strong enough to laugh at misery,

And bear the chance of war yet. We are prisoners

I fear for ever, cousin.

Arc. I believe it;

And to that destiny have patiently

Laid up my hour to come.

Pal. Oh, cousin Arcite,
Where is Thebes now? where is our noble country?

Where are our friends, and kindreds? Never more

Must we behold those comforts; never see
The hardy youths strive for the games of honour,

Hung with the painted favours of their ladies,
Like tall ships under sail; then start amongst 'em,

And, as an east wind, leave 'em all behind us
Like lazy clouds, whilst Palamon and Arcite,
Even in the wagging of a wanton leg,

Outstripp'd the people's praises, won the garlands,

Ere they have time to wish 'em ours. Oh, never

Shall we two exercise, like twins of honour,
Our arms again, and feel our fiery horses
Like proud seas under us! Our good swords
now,

(Better the red-eyed god of war ne'er wore,)
Ravish'd our sides, like age, must run to rust,
And deck the temples of those gods that hate
us;

These hands shall never draw them out like lightning,

To blast whole armies more!

Arc. No, Palamon,
Those hopes are prisoners with us: here we are,

And here the graces of our youths must wither,

Like a too-timely spring; here age must find us,

And, which is heaviest, Palamon, unmarried;
The sweet embraces of a loving wife,

Loaden with kisses, arm'd with thousand Cupids,

Shall never clasp our necks! no issue know us;

No figures of ourselves shall we e'er see,
To glad our age, and like young eagles teach them

Boldly to gaze against bright arms, and say,
Remember what your fathers were, and conquer!

The fair-eyed maids shall weep our banishments,

And in their songs curse ever blinded Fortune,

Till she for shame see what a wrong she has done

To youth and nature: this is all our world;

We shall know nothing here, but one another;

Hear nothing, but the clock that tells our woes;

The vine shall grow, but we shall never see it;
Summer shall come, and with her all delights,
But dead cold winter must inhabit here still!

Pal. 'Tis too true, Arcite! To our Theban hounds,

That shook the aged forest with their echoes,
No more now must we halloo: no more shake
Our pointed javelins, whilst the angry swine
Flies like a Parthian quiver from our rages,
Struck with our well-steel'd darts! All valiant uses

(The food and nourishment of noble minds)

In us two here shall perish; we shall die,

(Which is the curse of honour!) lastly,

Children of grief and ignorance.

Arc. Yet, cousin,
Even from the bottom of these miseries,
From all that fortune can inflict upon us,
I see two comforts rising, two mere blessings,
If the gods please to hold here,—a brave
patience,
And the enjoying of our griefs together.
Whilst Palamon is with me, let me perish
If I think this our prison!

Pal. Certainly,
'Tis a main goodness, cousin, that our fortunes
Were twinn'd together: 'tis most true, two
souls
Put in two noble bodies, let them suffer
The gall of hazard, so they grow together,
Will never sink; they must not; say they
could,
A willing man dies sleeping, and all's done.

Arc. Shall we make worthy uses of this place,
That all men hate so much?

Pal. How, gentle cousin?
Arc. Let's think this prison holy sanc-
tuary,

To keep us from corruption of worse men!
We are young, and yet desire the ways of
honour;

That liberty and common conversation,
The poison of pure spirits, might, like women,
Woo us to wander from. What worthy blessing
Can be, but our imaginations
May make it ours? and here being thus
together,

We are an endless mine to one another;
We are one another's wife, ever begetting
New births of love; we are father, friends,
acquaintance,

We are, in one another, families;
I am your heir, and you are mine; this place
Is our inheritance; no hard oppressor
Dare take this from us: here, with a little
patience,

We shall live long, and loving; no surfeits
seek us;

The hand of war hurts none here, nor the seas
Swallow their youth; were we at liberty,
A wife might part us lawfully, or business;
Quarrels consume us; envy of ill men
Crave our acquaintance; I might sicken,
cousin,

Where you should never know it, and so
perish

Without your noble hand to close mine eyes,
Or prayers to the gods: a thousand chances,
Were we from hence, would sever us.

Pal. You have made me
(I thank you, cousin Arcite!) almost wanton
With my captivity: what a misery
It is to live abroad, and everywhere!
'Tis like a beast, methinks! I find the court
here,

I'm sure a more content; and all those
pleasures,

That woo the wills of men to vanity,
I see through now; and am sufficient
To tell the world, 'tis but a gaudy shadow,
That old Time, as he passes by, takes with him.
What had we been, old in the court of Creon,
Where sin is justice, lust and ignorance
The virtues of the great ones! Cousin Arcite,
Had not the loving gods found this place for
us,

We had died as they do, ill old men unwept,
And had their epitaphs, the people's curses!
Shall I say more?

Arc. I would hear you still.

Pal. You shall.
Is there record of any two that loved
Better than we do, Arcite?

Arc. Sure there cannot.

Pal. I do not think it possible our friend-
ship
Should ever leave us.

Arc. Till our deaths it cannot;
And after death our spirits shall be led
To those that love eternally."

The following is Mr. Spalding's criticism with reference to this scene:—"The dialogue is in many respects admirable. It possesses much eloquence of description, and the character of the language is smooth and flowing; the versification is good and accurate, frequent in double endings, and usually finishing the sense with the line; and one or two allusions occur, which, being favourites of Fletcher's, may be in themselves a strong presumption of his authorship; the images too have in some instances a want of distinctness in application, or a vagueness of outline, which could be easily paralleled from Fletcher's acknowledged writings. The style is fuller of allusions than his usually is, but the images are more correct and better kept from confusion than Shakspeare's; some of them indeed are exquisite, but rather in the romantic and exclusively poetical tone of Fletcher than in the natural and universal

mode of feeling which animates Shakspeare. The dialogue too proceeds less energetically than Shakspeare's, falling occasionally into a style of long-drawn disquisition which Fletcher often substitutes for the quick and dramatic conversations of the great poet. On the whole, however, this scene, if it be Fletcher's (of which I have no doubt), is among the very finest he ever wrote; and there are many passages in which, while he preserves his own distinctive marks, he has gathered no small portion of the flame and inspiration of his immortal friend and assistant." He adds—"In this scene there is one train of metaphors which is perhaps as characteristic of Fletcher as anything that could be produced. It is marked by a slowness of association which he often shows. Several allusions are successively introduced; but by each, as it appears, we are prepared for, and can anticipate, the next: we see the connection of ideas in the poet's mind through which the one has sprung out of the other, and that all are but branches, of which one original thought is the root. All this is the work of a less fertile fancy and a more tardy understanding than Shakspeare's: he would have leaped over many of the intervening steps, and, reaching at once the most remote particular of the series, would have immediately turned away to weave some new chain of thought." The close of the prison-scene, in which the two young men become bitter enemies, will furnish us another extract, which abundantly shows the accuracy of Mr. Spalding's conception of the peculiarities of Fletcher.

Pal. You shall not love at all.

Arc. Not love at all? who shall deny me?

Pal. I that first saw her; I that took possession

First with mine eyes of all those beauties in her

Reveal'd to mankind! If thou lovest her,
Or entertain'st a hope to blast my wishes,
Thou art a traitor, Arcite, and a fellow
False as thy title to her: friendship, blood,
And all the ties between us, I disclaim,
If thou once think upon her!

Arc. Yes, I love her;
And if the lives of all my name lay on it,

I must do so; I love her with my soul.
If that will lose you, farewell, Palamon!
I say again, I love; and, in loving her, maintain

I am as worthy and as free a lover,
And have as just a title to her beauty,
As any Palamon, or any living,
That is a man's son.

Pal. Have I call'd thee friend?

Arc. Yes, and have found me so. Why are you moved thus?

Let me deal coldly with you! am not I
Part of your blood, part of your soul? you
have told me

That I was Palamon, and you were Arcite.

Pal. Yes.

Arc. Am not I liable to those affections,
Those joys, griefs, angers, fears, my friend
shall suffer?

Pal. You may be.

Arc. Why then would you deal so cunningly,

So strangely, so unlike a Noble Kinsman,
To love alone? Speak truly; do you think me
Unworthy of her sight?

Pal. No; but unjust
If thou pursue that sight.

Arc. Because another
First sees the enemy, shall I stand still,
And let mine honour down, and never charge?

Pal. Yes, if he be but one.

Arc. But say that one
Had rather combat me?

Pal. Let that one say so,
And use thy freedom! else, if thou pursuest
her,
Be as that cursed man that hates his country,
A branded villain!

Arc. You are mad.

Pal. I must be,
Till thou art worthy: Arcite, it concerns me;
And, in this madness, if I hazard thee
And take thy life, I deal but truly.

Arc. Fie, sir!

You play the child extremely: I will love
her,

I must, I ought to do so, and I dare;
And all this justly.

Pal. Oh, that now, that now,
Thy false self, and thy friend, had but this
fortune,
To be one hour at liberty, and grasp
Our good swords in our hands, I'd quickly
teach thee

What 'twere to filch affection from another !
Thou 'rt baser in it than a cutpurse !

Put but thy head out of this window more,
And, as I have a soul, I 'll nail thy life to 't !

Arc. Thou dars't not, fool ; thou canst not ;
thou art feeble !

Put my head out ? I 'll throw my body out,
And leap the garden, when I see her next,
And pitch between her arms, to anger thee.

Pal. No more ; the keeper's coming : I shall
live

To knock thy brains out with my shackles."

We are now arrived at a part of the tale where the poetry of Chaucer assumes the dramatic form. The description of Emilia walking in the garden, and the first sight of her by Palamon ; with the imaginative love, and the subsequent prostration of his heart before the same vision by Arcite,—are all told with wonderful spirit by the old poet. The entire passage is too long for extract, but we give some lines which will show that the energy of Chaucer imposed no common task of rivalry upon him who undertook to dramatize this scene of passion :—

" This Palamon 'gan knit his browés tway.
' It were,' quod he, ' to thee no great honour
For to be false, ne for to be traytour
To me, that am thy cousin and thy brother
Ysworn full deep, and each of us to other,
That never for to dien in the pain,
Till that the death departen shall us twain,
Neither of us in love to hinder other,
Ne in none other case, my levé brother ;
But that thou shouldest truly further me
In every case as I should further thee.
This was thine oath, and mine also, certain ;
I wot it well, thou dar'st it not withsain :
Thus art thou of my counsel out of doubt,
And now thou wouldest falsely been about
To love my lady, whom I love and serve,
And ever shall till that mine hearté starve.

" ' Now certés, false Arcite, thou shalt not so :
I lov'd her first, and toldé thee my woe
As to my counsel, and my brother sworn
To further me as I have told beforne.
For which thou art ybounden as a knight
To helpen me, if it lie in thy might,
Or ellés art thou false I dare well say'n.'
This Arcité full proudly spake again.

" ' Thou shalt,' quod he, ' be rather false
than I,

And thou art false, I tell thee utterly ;
For *par amour* I lov'd her first ere thou.' "

It is a remarkable circumstance that one of the conditions of the friendship of the young men—the chivalric bond,

" Neither of us in love to hinder other,"—

so capable of dramatic expansion, has been passed over by the writer of this scene in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen.' The story is followed by the dramatist in Arcite being freed ; but in Chaucer he returns to Thebes, and after a long absence comes to the court of Theseus in disguise. The unity of time is preserved in the drama, by making him a victor in athletic sports, and thus introduced to the favour of Theseus and the service of Emilia. In Chaucer, Palamon, after seven years' durance,

" By helping of a friend brake his prison."

The gaoler's daughter is a parasitical growth around the old vigorous tree.

Palamon is fled to the woods. Arcite has ridden to the fields to make his May-garland ; and his unhappy friend, fearful of pursuit, hears him, unknown, sing—

" Mayé, with all thy flowrés and thy green,
Right welcome be thou fairé freshé May,
I hope that I some green here getten may."

The old poet continues, with his inimitable humour :—

" When that Arcite had roamed all his fill,
And sungen all the roundel lustily,
Into a study he fell suddenly,
As do these lovers in their quainté gears,
Now in the crop, and now down in the breres,
Now up, now down, as bucket in a well."

The lover gives utterance to his lamentations ; his rival hears him, and starts out of the bushes with, " False Arcite, false traitor ! " Arcite proposes that they should determine their contention by mortal combat on the following day :—

" Here I will be founden as a knight,
And bringen harness right enough for thee,
And choose the best, and leave the worst for
me :
And meat and drinké this night will I bring."

The corresponding scene in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' is finely written. There is a quiet strength about it which exhibits very high art. The structure of the verse, too, is somewhat different from that of the prison scene between the friends. But still we have no difficulty in believing that it might be written by the author of that previous scene. The third scene, where Arcite comes to Palamon "with meat, wine, and files," is merely the carrying out of the action promised in the previous interview. It is unnecessary for the dramatic movement. We quite agree with Mr. Spalding in his estimate of this scene—that it is not very characteristic of either Shakspeare or Fletcher, but that it "leans towards Fletcher; and one argument for him might be drawn from an interchange of sarcasms between the kinsmen, in which they retort on each other former amorous adventures: such a dialogue is quite like Fletcher's men of gaiety." The combat itself takes place in the sixth scene. The passage in Chaucer upon which this scene is founded possesses all his characteristic energy. The hard outline which it presents is in some degree a natural consequence of its force and clearness:—

"And in the grove, at time and place yset,
This Arcite and this Palamon been met.
Tho changen 'gan the colour in their face;
Right as the hunter in the regne of Thrace
That standeth at a gappé with a spear,
When hunted is the lion or the bear,
And heareth him come rushing in the greves,
And breaking both the boughés and the leaves,
And think'th, 'Here com'th my mortal enemy,
Withouten fail he must be dead or I;
For either I must slay him at the gap,
Or he must slay me, if that me mishap.'
So fareden they in changing of their hue,
As far as either of them other knew.
There n'as no good day, ne no saluing,
But straight withouten wordés rehearsing,
Everich of them help to armen other
As friendly as he were his owen brother;
And after that with sharpé spearés strong
They foinden each at other wonder long."

It is upon the "everich of them help to armen other" that the dramatist has founded the interchange of courtesies between the

two kinsmen. The conception and execution of this scene are certainly very graceful; but the grace is carried somewhat too far to be natural. The dramatic situation is finely imagined; but in the hands of a writer of the highest power it might, we think, have been carried beyond the point of elegance, or even of beauty; it might have been rendered deeply pathetic, upon the principle that at the moment of mortal conflict the deep-seated affection of the two young men would have grappled with the chimerical passion which each had taken to his heart, and would have displayed itself in something more eminently tragic than the constrained courtesy of the scene before us. It is this power of dealing with high passions which appears to us to be most wanting in the scenes where passion is required. It is answered, that those scenes are written by Fletcher, and not by Shakspeare. Of this presently. The interruption to the combat by Theseus and his train; the condemnation of the rivals by the duke; the intercession of Hippolyta and Emilia; and the final determination that the knights should depart, and within a month return accompanied by other knights to contend in bodily strength for the fair prize—these incidents are founded pretty closely upon Chaucer, with the exception that the elder poet does not make Theseus decree that the vanquished should die upon the block. The scene has no marked deviation in style from that which precedes it.

The supposed interval of time during the absence of the knights is filled up by Chaucer with some of the finest descriptions which can be found amongst the numberless vivid pictures which his writings exhibit. In 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' the whole of the fourth act is occupied with the progress of the under-plot; with the exception of the second scene, which commences with the long and not very dramatic soliloquy of Emilia upon the pictures of her two lovers, and is followed by an equally undramatic description by a messenger of the arrival of the princes and of the qualities of their companions. This description is founded upon Chaucer. We pass on to the fifth act.

Chaucer has wonderfully described the temples of Venus, of Mars, and of Diana. The dramatist has followed him in making Arcite address himself to Mars, Palamon to Venus, and Emilia to Diana. Parts of these scenes are without all doubt the finest passages of the play, surpassed by very few things indeed within their own poetical range. The addresses of Arcite to Mars, and of Emilia to Diana, possess a condensation of thought, a strength of imagery, and a majesty of language, almost unequalled by the very highest masters of the art; but they as properly belong to the epic as to the dramatic division of poetry. The invocation of Palamon to Venus, although less sustained and less pleasing, is to our minds more dramatic: it belongs more to romantic poetry. The nobler invocations are cast in a classical mould. As this play is not well known to all readers of Shakspeare, we give these very remarkable passages:—

Arc. Thou mighty one, that with thy power
hast turn'd
Green Neptune into purple; whose approach
Comets prewarn; whose havoc in vast field
Unearthed skulls proclaim; whose breath
blows down
The teeming Ceres' foison; who dost pluck
With hand armipotent from forth blue clouds
The mason'd turrets; that both mak'st and
break'st
The stony girths of cities; me, thy pupil,
Young'st follower of thy drum, instruct this
day
With military skill, that to thy laud
I may advance my streamer, and by thee
Be styled the lord o' the day! Give me, great
Mars,
Some token of thy pleasure!

[Here they (ARCITE and his KNIGHTS) fall on their faces as formerly, and there is heard clanging of armour, with a short thunder, as the burst of a battle, whereupon they all rise, and bow to the Altar.]

Oh, great corrector of enormous times.
Shaker of o'er-rank states, thou grand decider
Of dusty and old titles, that heal'st with blood
The earth when it is sick, and cur'st the world
Of the plurisy of people; I do take

Thy signs auspiciously, and in thy name
To my design march boldly. Let us go!

* * * * *

Emi. Oh, sacred, shadowy, cold, and constant queen,
Abandoner of revels, mute, contemplative,
Sweet, solitary, white as chaste, and pure
As wind-fann'd snow, who to thy female
knights
Allow'st no more blood than will make a
blush,
Which is their order's robe; I here, thy
priest,
Am humbled 'fore thine altar. Oh, vouch-
safe,
With that thy rare green eye, which never
yet
Beheld thing maculate, look on thy virgin!
And, sacred silver mistress, lend thine ear
(Which ne'er heard scurril term, into whose
port
Ne'er enter'd wanton sound) to my petition,
Season'd with holy fear! This is my last
Of vestal office; I am bride-habited,
But maiden-hearted; a husband I have ap-
pointed,
But do not know him; out of two I should
Choose one, and pray for his success, but I
Am guiltless of election of mine eyes;
Were I to lose one, (they are equal precious,)
I could doom neither; that which perish'd
should
Go to't unsentenced: therefore, most modest
queen,
He, of the two pretenders, that best loves me,
And has the truest title in't, let him
Take off my wheaten garland, or else grant
The file and quality I hold, I may
Continue in thy band.

The combat scene is not presented on the stage. The absence of it is certainly managed with very great skill. Emilia refuses to be present; she is alone; the tumult is around her; rumour upon rumour is brought to her; she attempts to analyse her own feelings; and we must say that she appears to be thinking more of herself than is consistent with a very high conception of female excellence. Arcite is eventually the victor. Palamon and his friends appear on the scaffold, prepared for death. Then comes the catastrophe of Arcite's sudden calamity in

the hour of triumph; and this again is description. The death of Arcite is told by Chaucer with great pathos; and the address of the dying man to Emilia is marked by a truth and sympathy infinitely touching:—

“What is this world? what asken men to have?
Now with his love, now in his coldé grave—
Alone—withouten any company.
Farewell, my sweet,—Farewell, mine Emily!
And softé take me in your armés tway
For love of God, and hearkeneth what I say.

I have here with my cousin Palamon
Had strife and rancour many a day agone
For love of you, and for my jealousy;
And Jupiter to wis my soulé gie,
To speaken of a servant properly,
With allé circumstances truély,
That is to say, truth, honour, and knighthed,
Wisdom, humbless, estate, and high kindred,
Freedom, and all that 'longeth to that art,
So Jupiter have of my soulé part,
As in this world right now ne know I none
So worthy to be loved as Palamon,
That serveth you, and will do all his life;
*And if that ever ye shall be a wife,
Forget not Palamon, the gentle man.*”

The dramatic poet falls short of this:—

“Take Emilia,
And with her all the world's joy. Reach thy
hand;
Farewell! I have told my last hour. I was
false,
Yet never treacherous: Forgive me, cousin!
One kiss from fair Emilia! 'T is done:
Take her. I die!”

In this imperfect analysis of ‘The Two Noble Kinsmen,’ as compared with the ‘Palamon and Arcite’ of Chaucer, we have necessarily laid aside all those scenes which belong to the under-plot, namely, the love of the gaoler's daughter for Palamon, her agency in his escape from prison, her subsequent madness, and her unnatural and revolting union with one who is her lover under these circumstances. The question which we have here to examine is, whether Shakspeare had any concern with the authorship of this play; and it is perfectly evident that this under-plot was of a nature not to be conceived by him, and further not to be tolerated in any work with which he was

concerned. Had he made “the friend” who delivered Chaucer's Palamon from prison to appear on the stage as a woman, she would have been a timid, confiding, self-denying, spirit-bound woman, which character he of all men could represent best; and not a creature of mere sexual affection. Assuming that he wrote any part of the play, we may safely lay aside this part as having his participation or concurrence. Our inquiry is then reduced to narrower limits. We have to ask what portion of the original poem of Chaucer Shakspeare is supposed to have dramatised, and what portion was the work of a coadjutor. The stage tradition was, that he wrote the first act. The searching analysis of Mr. Spalding leads to the conclusion that he wrote all that relates to the main story in the first and fifth acts, and a scene of the third act; amounting to little short of half the play. To Fletcher is assigned the remainder. Mr. Spalding says that an attentive study of this drama from beginning to end “would convince the most sceptical mind that two authors were concerned in the work; it would be perceived that certain scenes are distinguished by certain prominent characters, while others present different and dissimilar features.” These differences, Mr. Spalding has justly shown in the case of Fletcher as compared with Shakspeare, are so striking, that “we are not compelled to reason from difference in *degree*, because we are sensible of a striking dissimilarity in *kind*. We observe ease and elegance of expression opposed to energy and quaintness; brevity is met by dilation, and the obscurity which results from hurry of conception has to be compared with the vagueness proceeding from indistinctness of ideas; lowness, narrowness, and poverty of thought are contrasted with elevation, richness, and comprehension: on the one hand is an intellect barely active enough to seek the true elements of the poetical, and on the other a mind which, seeing those finer relations at a glance, darts off in the wantonness of its luxuriant strength to discover qualities with which poetry is but ill fitted to deal.” This is strikingly and truly put. Yet, be it observed, it has reference only to the drapery

of the dramatic action and characterization—the condensation or expansion of the thought—the tameness or luxuriance of the imagery—the equable flow or the involved harmony of the versification. The real body of a drama is its action and characterization. It is the constant subordination of all the ordinary poetical excellences to the main design, to be carried on through the agency of different passions, temperaments, and humours, that constitutes the dramatic art. To judge of a question of authorship, and especially of such a question with reference to Shakspeare, we must not only take into consideration the resemblances in what we call style (we use this for the want of a more comprehensive word), but in the management of the action and the development of the characters. Such inquiries as these are not without their instruction, if they lead us by analysis and comparison to a better appreciation of what constitutes the highest qualities of art. The best copy of a picture is necessarily inferior to the original; but we may better learn the value of the original by a close examination of the copy;—and this is the position which we are about to take up in the question of the authorship of ‘The Two Noble Kinsmen.’ We hold that in parts it bears a most remarkable resemblance to Shakspeare in the qualities of detached thought, of expression, of versification; and not so with reference to Shakspeare’s early and unformed style, but to the peculiarities of his later period. But we hold, at the same time, that the management of the subject is equally *unlike* Shakspeare; that the poetical form of what is attributed to him is for the most part epic, and not dramatic; that the action does not disclose itself, nor the characters exhibit their own qualities.

The fact that, amongst the extraordinary multitude of plays produced in the palmy half-century of the stage, a very great many were composed upon the principle of a division of labour between two, and sometimes three and even four writers, is too satisfactorily established for us to consider that the difficulties attending upon such a partnership would produce imperfect and fragmentary performances where there was

not the closest friendship. It is probable, however, that the intimate social life of the poets of that day, many of whom were also actors, led to such a joint invention of plot and character as would enable two or more to work readily upon a defined plan, each bringing to the whole a contribution from his own peculiar stores. The ordinary mixture too of the serious and comic portions of a drama facilitated such an arrangement; and the general introduction of an under-plot, sometimes very slightly hung upon the main action, would still further render the union even of more than two writers not a very difficult thing to manage. It must be considered also that the dramatists of that age were all, or very nearly all, thoroughly familiar with stage business. As we have said, many of them were actors; and the literary employment of those who were not so was, if we may use the term, so professional, that it was as necessary for them to be familiar with the practice of the theatre as for a lawyer to know by daily habit the rules of court. All these circumstances made such dramatic partnerships comparatively easy to manage. But we must not cease to bear in mind that these arrangements must always have had especial reference to the particular capacities and excellences of the persons so united, as known by experience, or suggested by their own promptings of what they were most fitted to accomplish. Let us apply these considerations to the case before us.

Shakspeare and Fletcher, we will assume, agree to write a play on the subject of Chaucer’s tale of ‘Palamon and Arcite.’ It is a subject which Shakspeare in some respects would have rejoiced in. It was familiar to many of his audience in the writings of England’s finest old poet. It was known to the early stage. It was surrounded with those romantic attributes of the old legendary tale which appear to have seized upon his imagination at a particular period of his life, and that not an early one. But, above all, it was a subject full of deep feeling,—where overwhelming passions were to be brought into contact with habitual affections; a subject, too, not the less in-

teresting because it required to be treated with great nicety of handling. It may be presumed that, if such a partnership had been proposed by Fletcher to Shakspeare (the belief that Shakspeare would have solicited Fletcher's assistance is not very probable), the younger poet would have offered to the great master of dramatic action, to the profound anatomist of character, to him who knew best how to give to the deepest and most complicated emotions their full and appropriate language—his own proper task of exhibiting the deep friendship, the impassioned rivalry, the terrible hatred, and the final reconciliation of the two heroes of the tale. The less practised poet might have contented himself with the accessory scenes, those of the introduction and of the under-plot. Now, according to the just belief which has been raised upon the dissimilarities of style, Fletcher has not only taken the under-plot, but all, or nearly all, the scenes that demanded the greatest amount of dramatic power, the exhibition of profound emotion in connection with nice distinction of character. It was not the poetical faculty alone that was here wanting,—that power which Fletcher possessed of expressing somewhat ordinary thoughts in equable and well-rounded verse, producing agreeable sensations, but rarely rising into the sublime or the pathetic, and never laying bare those hidden things in the nature of man which lie too deep for every-day philosophy, but when revealed become truths that require no demonstration. Shakspeare, on the contrary, according to the same just belief as to the internal evidence of style, takes those parts which require the least dramatic power,—the descriptive and didactic parts; those which, to a great extent, are of an epic character, containing, like a poem properly epic, set and solemn speeches, elaborate narration, majestic invocations to the presiding deities. There can be no doubt as to the high excellence of these portions of the work. But is such a division of labour the natural one between Shakspeare and Fletcher? If it be said that Shakspeare left portions of a posthumous play which Fletcher finished, we have the same objec-

tion differently applied. The internal evidence of style would lead us to assign the first and last acts to Shakspeare. The course of the action would of necessity adhere pretty closely to the tale of Chaucer; and thus the beginning and the end might have been written without any very strict reference to what was to come between, provided the subject were in the hands of an author who would look at the completeness of the narrative as the main thing to be worked out. Shakspeare might have made the preliminary scenes as full as we find them in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen;' but when we look at the conciseness with which Chaucer gives the same scenes, and hurries on to the more dramatic parts of the subject, we do not very readily believe that Shakspeare would have taken the opposite course. Skilful as he is in the introduction of his subjects, in the preparation with which he brings the mind into the proper state for comprehending and feeling the higher interests which are to be developed, he comes, in almost every case, with that decision which is a quality of the highest genius, to grapple with the passions and characters of the agents who are to work out the events; and when he has done this, and has our imaginations completely subdued to his power, he delays or precipitates the catastrophe,—sometimes lingering in some scene of gentleness or repose to restore the balance of feeling, and to keep the tragic within the limits of pleasurable emotion,—and sometimes clearing away by a sudden movement all the involutions of the plot, shedding his sunlight on all the darkneses of character, and yet making this unexpected dénouement the only one compatible with truth and nature. It was out of Shakspeare's own power, we believe, because incompatible with those principles of art which were to him as an unerring instinct, to produce the last scenes of a play before he had worked out the characterization which would essentially determine the details of the event. The theory that Shakspeare left a portion of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen,' which, after his death, was completed by Fletcher, is one which, upon a mature consideration of the subject, we are constrained to reject,

although it has often presented itself to us as the most plausible of the theories which would necessarily associate themselves with the belief that Shakspeare had written a considerable portion of this play.

In his 'Specimens of English Dramatic Poets,' Charles Lamb selects from 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' nearly all the first scene of the first act, part of the scene between Emilia and Hippolyta in the same act, and the dialogue between Palamon and Arcite, before Emilia comes into the garden, in Act II. The latter scene he says "bears indubitable marks of Fletcher: the two which precede it give strong countenance to the tradition that Shakspeare had a hand in this play." These and other passages, he adds, "have a luxuriance in them which strongly resembles Shakspeare's manner *in those parts of his plays where, the progress of the interest being subordinate, the poet was at leisure for description.*" Upon a principle, then, of arranged co-operation with Fletcher, Shakspeare had produced only those parts of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' in which the interest is subordinate, and which should resemble his manner when he was at leisure for description. This is the main point which, with every deference for the opinion, founded upon a comparison of style, that Shakspeare was associated in this play with Fletcher, we venture to urge as evidence that ought to be impartially taken in support of the opinion that Shakspeare was not concerned in it at all. Our own judgment, as far as the question of style is concerned, very nearly coincides with that of the author of the ingenious 'Letter' to which we have several times referred; but, on a careful examination of the whole question, we are inclined to a belief that Shakspeare did not participate in the authorship. We do not, on the other hand, go along with Tieck, who, with somewhat of an excess of that boldness with which his countrymen pronounce opinions upon the niceties of style in a foreign language, says of this play, "I have never been able to convince myself that a single verse has been written by Shakspeare. The manner, the language, the versification is as thoroughly Fletcher as any other of his

pieces. If Shakspeare had the capability of altering his language so variously as we here see, yet he nowhere presents exaggerations of thought and feeling in soft and flowing speeches, which is the characteristic of Fletcher." * This is to mistake the question at issue. Nobody has ever supposed that Shakspeare wrote the parts that are commonly assigned to Fletcher; and therefore nobody accused him of putting exaggerated thoughts in soft and flowing speeches. If Tieck, however, considers the scenes of the first act, to which he distinctly alludes, to be in Fletcher's natural and habitual manner, he maintains a theory which in our opinion is more untenable than any which has been proposed upon the question. Steevens holds that the play is for the most part a studied imitation of Shakspeare by Fletcher. But, if he has imitated style, he has also imitated character; and that most weakly. The gaoler's daughter is a most diluted copy of Ophelia; the Schoolmaster, of Holofernes; the clowns, with their mummery, of the "rude mechanicals" of 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream.' This very circumstance, by the way, is evidence that there was no distinct concert between Shakspeare and Fletcher as to the mode in which the subject should be treated. We agree with Lamb, that Fletcher, with all his facility, could not have so readily gone out of his habitual manner to produce an imitation of Shakspeare's condensed and involved style. He frequently copies Shakspeare in slight resemblances of thought, but the manner is always essentially different. These scenes in 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' are not in Fletcher's manner; it was not very probable, even if he had the power, that he would write them in imitation of Shakspeare. We believe that Shakspeare did not write them himself. We are bound, therefore, to produce a theory which may attempt, however imperfectly, to reconcile these difficulties; and we do so with a due sense of the doubts which must always surround such questions, and which in this case are not likely to be obviated by any suggestion of our own, which can pretend to

* 'Alt-Englisches Theater, oder Supplemente zum Shakspeare.'

little beyond the character of a mere conjecture, not hurriedly adopted, but certainly propounded without any great confidence in its validity.

We hold, then, that Fletcher, for the most part, wrote the scenes which the best critical opinions concur in attributing to him: we hold, also, that he had a coadjutor who produced for the most part the scenes attributed by the same authorities to Shakspeare: but we hold, further, that this coadjutor was *not* Shakspeare himself.

Coleridge has thrown out a suggestion that parts of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' might have been written by Jonson. He was probably led into this opinion by the classical tone which occasionally prevails, especially in the first scene, and in the invocations of the fifth act. The address to Diana,—

"Oh, sacred, shadowy, cold, and constant queen,

Abandoner of revels, mute, contemplative,

Sweet, solitary, white as chaste, and pure

As wind-fann'd snow,"—

at once reminds us of

"Queen and huntress, chaste and fair:"

more perhaps from the associations of the subject than from Jonson's manner of treating it. But Coleridge goes on to state that the main presumption for Shakspeare's share in this play rests upon the construction of the blank verse. He holds that construction to be evidence either of an intentional imitation of Shakspeare, or of his own proper hand. He then argues, from the assumption that Fletcher was the imitator, that there was an improbability that *he* would have been conscious of the inferiority of his own versification, which Coleridge calls "too poematic minus-dramatic." The improbability, then, that Fletcher imitated Shakspeare in portions of the play, writing other portions in his own proper language and versification, throws the critic back upon the other conjecture, that Shakspeare's own hand is to be found in it. But then again he says, "The harshness of many of these very passages, a harshness unrelieved by any lyrical inter-breathings, and still more

the want of profundity in the thoughts, keep me from an absolute decision." We state these opinions of Coleridge with reference to what we must briefly call the style of the different parts, to show that any decision of the question founded mainly upon the style is not to be considered certain even within its own proper limits. We have rested our doubts principally upon another foundation; but, taken together, the two modes of viewing the question, whether as to style or dramatic structure, require that we should look out for another partner than Shakspeare in producing this work in alliance with Fletcher. Coleridge appears to have thought the same when he threw out the name of Jonson; but we cannot conceive that, if he had pursued this inquiry analytically, he would have abided by this conjecture. Jonson's proper versification is more different from Shakspeare's than perhaps that of any other of his contemporaries; and we doubt if his mind was plastic enough, or his temper humble enough, to allow him to become the imitator of any man. We request our readers to compare the following invocation by Jonson, from 'Cynthia's Revels,' with the invocation to Mars in the fifth act of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen;' and we think they will agree that the versification of Jonson, in a form in which both the specimens are undramatic, is essentially different:—

"Phœbus Apollo, if, with ancient rites,
And due devotions, I have ever hung
Elaborate pæans on thy golden shrine,
Or sung thy triumphs in a lofty strain,
Fit for a theatre of gods to hear;
And thou, the other son of mighty Jove,
Cyllenian Mercury, sweet Maia's joy,
If in the busy tumults of the mind
My path thou ever hast illumined,
For which thine altars I have oft perfum'd,
And deck'd thy statues with discolour'd
flowers:

Now thrive invention in this glorious court,
That not of bounty only, but of right,
Cynthia may grace, and give it life by sight."

Here is no variety of pause; the couplet with which the speech concludes is not different from the pairs of blank-verse which

have gone before, except in the rhyming of the tenth syllables. But there is another writer of that period who might have been associated with Fletcher in the production of a drama, and did participate in such stage partnerships: who, from some limited resemblances to Shakspeare that we shall presently notice, might without any improbability be supposed to have written those portions of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' which are *decidedly* and *essentially* different from the style of Fletcher. We select, though probably not the best selection we could make, a passage of the same general character as the invocations so often mentioned, and which may be compared also with Jonson's address to Apollo. It is an invocation to Behemoth:—

"Terror of darkness! oh thou king of flames!
That with thy music-footed horse dost strike
The clear light out of crystal, on dark earth,
And hurl'st instructive fire about the world,
Wake, wake, the drowsy and enchanted
night,
That sleeps with dead eyes in this heavy
riddle:
Oh, thou great prince of shades, where never
sun
Sticks his far-darted beams, whose eyes are
made
To shine in darkness, and see ever best
Where men are blindest! open now the heart
Of thy abashed oracle, that for fear
Of some ill it includes would fain lie hid,
And rise thou with it in thy greater light."

The writer of this invocation, which we select from the tragedy of 'Bussy D'Ambois,' is George Chapman.

Webster, in his dedication to 'Vittoria Corombona,' speaks of "that full and heightened style of Master Chapman," in the same sentence with "the laboured and understanding works of Master Jonson." It is in the "full and heightened style" that we shall seek resemblances to parts of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen,' rather than in the "laboured and understanding works." We are supported in this inquiry by the opinion of one of the most subtle and yet most sensible of modern critics, Charles Lamb:—"Of all the English play-writers, Chapman

perhaps approaches nearest to Shakspeare in the descriptive and didactic, in passages which are less purely dramatic. Dramatic imitation was not his talent. He could not go out of himself, as Shakspeare could shift at pleasure, to inform and animate other existences, but in himself he had an eye to perceive and a soul to embrace all forms. He would have made a great epic poet, if, indeed, he has not abundantly shown himself to be one; for his 'Homer' is not so properly a translation as the stories of Achilles and Ulysses re-written." Our theory is, that the passages which have been ascribed to Shakspeare as a partner in the work of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' are essentially "descriptive and didactic;" that to write these passages it was not necessary that the poet should be able to "go out of himself;" that they, for the most part, might enter into the composition of a great epic poem; that the writer of these passages was master, to a considerable extent, of Shakspeare's style, especially in its conciseness and its solemnity, although he was ill fitted to grapple with its more dramatic qualities of rapidity or abruptness; that also, unlike most of the writers of his day, who sought only to please, he indulged in the same disposition as Shakspeare, to yield to the prevailing reflection which the circumstances of the scene were calculated to elicit; and, lastly, that his intimate acquaintance with the Greek poets fitted him to deal more especially with those parts of the tale of 'Palamon and Arcite' in which Chaucer, in common with all the middle-age poets, built a tale of chivalry upon a classical foundation. We can understand such a division of labour between Fletcher and Chapman, as that Fletcher should take the romantic parts of the story, as the knight-errantry, the love, the rivalry, the decision by bodily prowess,—and that Chapman should deal with Theseus and the Amazons, the lament of the three Queens, (which subject was familiar to him in 'The Seven against Thebes' of the Greek drama,) and the mythology which Chaucer had so elaborately sketched as the machinery of his great story.

Lord Byron somewhere says, speaking of his own play of 'Sardanapalus,' "I look upon Shakspeare to be the worst of models, though the most extraordinary of writers." We think, if Shakspeare be the worst of models, it is *because* he is the most extraordinary of writers. His prodigious depth of thought, his unbounded range of imagery, his intense truth of characterization, are not to be imitated. The other qualities which remain as a model lie beneath the surface. Imitate, if it be possible, the structure of his verse; the thought and the imagery are wanting, and the mere versification is a lifeless mass. Dryden says, in his preface to 'All for Love,' "In my style I have professed to imitate the divine Shakspeare." Open the play at any part, and see if the imitation has produced a resemblance. Rowe tells us that 'Jane Shore' is an imitation of Shakspeare. It is a painted daub of the print-shops imitating the colouring of Titian. Otway pieced 'Romeo and Juliet' into his 'Caius Marius,' where the necessity for imitation was actually forced upon him, in making *a cento* of Shakspeare's lines and his own; and yet the last speech of the Romeo of Otway's tragedy substitutes these three lines in the place of "Thus with a kiss I die:"—

"This world's gross air grows burthensome
already.
I am all a god; such heavenly joys transport
me,
That mortal sense grows sick, and faints with
lasting."

We mention these things to show that men of very high talent have not been able to grapple with Shakspeare's style in the way of imitation. A poet, and especially a contemporary poet, might have formed his own style, in some degree, upon Shakspeare; not only by the constant contemplation of his peculiar excellences, but through the general character that a man of the very highest genius impresses unconsciously upon the aggregate poetry of his age. This we believe to have been the case with Chapman. He was not an imitator of Shakspeare in the ordinary sense of the word; he could not

imitate him in his scenes of passion, because he could not "shift at pleasure, to inform and animate other existences." But, in a limited range, he approached Shakspeare, because he had the same earnestness, the same command of striking combinations of language, a rhythm in which harmony is blended with strength, a power of painting scenes by vivid description, a tendency to reflect and philosophize. All this Shakspeare had, but he had a great deal more. Is that *more* displayed in the scenes of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' which have been attributed to him? or, not being present, had Chapman the power of producing these scenes out of his own resources? This is a question which we certainly cannot pretend to answer satisfactorily: all that we can do is to compare a few peculiarities in the first and last acts of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' with passages that offer themselves in those of Chapman's works with which we have an acquaintance.

We will begin with a quality which is remarkable enough in passages of 'The Two Noble Kinsmen' to distinguish them from those written by Fletcher—we mean the presence of general truths and reflections, propounded always with energy, sometimes with solemnity, not dragged in as a moral at the end of a fable, but arising spontaneously out of the habit of the author's mind. Coleridge doubts the *profundity* of these thoughts—and we think he is right. We will select a few of such passages from 'The Two Noble Kinsmen;' and passages of a similar nature, taken somewhat hastily from three or four of Chapman's plays:—

TWO NOBLE KINSMEN.

"We come unseasonably; but when could
Grief
Cull forth, as unpang'd Judgment can, fitt'st
time
For best solicitation?"

"Oh, you heav'nly charmers,
What things you make of us! For what we
lack
We laugh, for what we have are sorry; still
Are children in some kind."

some of the pieces performed more dependent upon scenery and dresses and processions than in the later years of Elizabeth. The 'Birth of Merlin' belongs to the class of show-plays; and the elaboration of that portion which is addressed merely to the eye has imparted a character to those scenes in which the imagination is addressed through the dialogue. There is an essential want of refinement as well as of intellectual power, partly arising from this false principle of art, which addresses itself mainly to the senses. We have a succession of incidents without any unity of action. The human interest and the supernatural are jumbled together, so as to render each equally unreal. Extravagance is taken for force, and what is merely hideous is offered to us as sublime. The story, of course, belongs to the fabulous history of Britain. Its movements are so complicated that we should despair of tracing it through its scenes of war and love, of devilry and witchcraft. The Britons are invaded by the Saxons, but the British army is miraculously preserved by the power of Anselm, a hermit. The Saxons sue for peace to Aurelius, the King of Britain, but the monarch suddenly falls in love with Artesia, the daughter of the Saxon general, and marries her, against the wishes of all his court. Uter Pendragon, the brother of Aurelius, has been unaccountably missing, and he, it seems, had fallen in love with the same lady during his rambles. Upon the return of Prince Uter to his brother's court, the queen endeavours to obtain from him a declaration of unlawful attachment. Her object is to sow disunion amongst the Britons, to promote the ascendancy of the Saxons. She is successful, and the weak Aurelius joins his invaders. During the progress of these events we have love-episodes with the daughters of Donobert, a British nobleman. The character of Modestia, one of the daughters, who is resolved to dedicate herself to a religious life, is drawn with considerable skill, and she expresses herself with a quiet strength which contrasts advantageously with the turmoil around her:—

"Noble and virtuous! could I dream of marriage,

I should affect thee, Edwin. Oh my soul,
Here's something tells me that the best of
creatures,
These models of the world, weak man and
woman,
Should have their souls, their making, life,
and being,
To some more excellent use: if what the sense
Calls pleasure were our ends, we might justly
blame
Great Nature's wisdom, who rear'd a building
Of so much art and beauty, to entertain
A guest so far incertain, so imperfect:
If only speech distinguish us from beasts,
Who know no inequality of birth and place,
But still to fly from goodness; oh! how base
Were life at such a rate! No, no! that
Power
That gave to man his being, speech, and
wisdom,
Gave it for thankfulness. To Him alone
That made me thus, may I thence truly
know,
I'll pay to Him, not man, the love I owe."

The supernatural part of this play is altogether overdone, exhibiting far less skill in the management than a modern fairy spectacle for the Easter holidays. Before Merlin appears we have a Saxon magician produced who can raise the dead, and he makes Hector and Achilles come into the Saxon court very much after the fashion of the apparition of Marshal Saxe in the great gallery at Dresden (see Wraxall's 'Memoirs'). The stage-direction for this extraordinary exhibition is as follows:—

"Enter PROXIMUS, bringing in HECTOR, attired and armed after the Trojan manner, with target, sword, and battle-axe; a trumpet before him, and a Spirit in flame-colours with a torch: at the other door, ACHILLES, with his spear and falchion, a trumpet, and a Spirit in black before him: trumpets sound alarm, and they manage their weapons to begin the fight, and after some charges the Hermit steps between them, at which, seeming amazed, the Spirits tremble."

That the poet who produced the cauldron of the weird sisters should be supposed to have a hand in this child's play is little less than miraculous itself. But we soon cease to take an interest in mere Britons and

Saxons, for a clown and his sister arrive at court, seeking a father for a child which the lady is about to present to the world. After some mummary which is meant for comedy, we have the following stage-direction:—"Enter the Devil in man's habit richly attired, his feet and his head horrid;" and the young lady from the country immediately recognises the treacherous father. After another episode with Modestia and Edwin, thunder and lightning announce something terrible; the birth of Merlin has taken place, and his father the Devil properly introduces him reading a book and foretelling his own future celebrity. We have now prophecy upon prophecy and fight upon fight, blazing stars, dragons, and Merlin expounding all amidst the din. We learn that Artesia has poisoned her husband, and that Uter has become King Pendragon. The Saxons are defeated by the new king, by whom Artesia, as a murderess, is buried alive. In the mean time the Devil has again been making some proposals to Merlin's mother, which end greatly to his discomfiture, for his powerful son shuts him up in a rock. Merlin then, addressing his mother, proposes to her to retire to a solitude he has prepared for her, "to weep away the flesh you have offended with;" "and when you die," he proceeds,—

"I will erect a monument
Upon the verdant plains of Salisbury,—
No king shall have so high a sepulchre,—
With pendulous stones, that I will hang by
art,
Where neither lime nor mortar shall be used—
A dark enigma to the memory,
For none shall have the power to number
them;

A place that I will hallow for your rest;
Where no night-hag shall walk, nor were-wolf
tread,
Where Merlin's mother shall be sepulchred."

As this is a satisfactory account of the origin of Stonehenge, we might here conclude; but there is a little more to tell of this marvellous play. Uter, the triumphant king, desires Merlin to

"show the full event
That shall both end our reign and chronicle."

Merlin thus consents:—

"What Heaven decrees, fate hath no power to
alter:
The Saxons, sir, will keep the ground they
have,
And by supplying numbers still increase,
Till Britain be no more: So please your
grace,
I will, in visible apparitions,
Present you prophecies, which shall concern
Succeeding princes, which my art shall raise,
Till men shall call these times the latter
days.

[MERLIN strikes.

Hautboys. Enter a King in armour, his shield quartered with thirteen crowns. At the other end enter divers Princes, who present their crowns to him at his feet, and do him homage; then enters Death, and strikes him; he, growing sick, crowns CONSTANTINE."

This Merlin explains to represent Uter's son, Arthur, and his successor; at which the prince, much gratified, asserts,

"All future times shall still record this story,
Of Merlin's learned worth, and Arthur's
glory."

CHAPTER IV.

ESTIMATE OF SHAKSPERE BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES.

THE rank as a writer which Shakspeare took in his own time is determined by a few decided notices of him. These notices are as ample and as frequent as can be looked for in an age which had no critical records, and when writers, therefore, almost went out of their way to refer to their literary contemporaries, except for the purposes of set compliment. We believe that, as early as 1591, Spenser called attention to Shakspeare, as

“the man whom Nature self had made
To mock herself, and truth to imitate;”

describing him also as

“that same *gentle* spirit, from whose pen
Large streams of honey and sweet nectar
flow.”

We know that the envy of Greene, in 1592, pointed at him as “an absolute Johannes factotum, in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country;” and we receive this bitterness of the unfortunate dramatist against his more successful rival as a tribute to his power and his popularity. We consider that the apology of Chettle, who had edited the posthumous work of Greene containing this effusion of spite, was an acknowledgment of the established opinion of Shakspeare’s excellence as an author:—“Divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty, and his facetious grace in writing, that approves his art.” This was printed in 1592, and yet the man who had won this reluctant testimony to his art, by “his facetious grace in writing,” is held by modern authorities to have then been only a botcher of other men’s works, as if “facetious grace” were an expression that did not most happily mark the quality by which Shakspeare was then most eminently distinguished above all his contemporaries,—

his comic power,—his ability above all others to produce

“Fine counterfessance, and unhurtful sport,
Delight, and laughter, deck’d in seemly sort.”

But passages such as these, which it is almost impossible to apply to any other man than Shakspeare, are still only indirect evidence of the opinion which was formed of him when he was yet a very young writer. But a few years later we encounter the most *direct* testimony to his pre-eminence. He it was that, in 1598, was assigned his rank, not by any vague and doubtful compliment, not with any ignorance of what had been achieved by other men ancient and modern, but by the learned discrimination of a scholar; and that rank was with Homer, Hesiod, Euripides, Æschylus, Sophocles, Pindar, Phocylides, and Aristophanes amongst the Greeks; Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Silius Italicus, Lucan, Lucretius, Ausonius, and Claudian amongst the Latins; and Sidney, Spenser, Daniel, Drayton, Warner, Marlowe, and Chapman amongst the English. According to the same authority, it was “in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakspeare” that “the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives.” This praise was applied to his ‘Venus and Adonis,’ and other poems. But, for his dramas, he is raised above every native contemporary and predecessor: “As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins; so Shakspeare among the English is *the most excellent* in both kinds for the stage.” These are extracts with which many of our readers must be familiar. They are from ‘The Wits’ Commonwealth’ of Francis Meres, “Master of Arts of both Universities;” a book largely circulated, and mentioned with applause by contemporary writers. The author delivers not these sentences as his own peculiar opinion; he speaks unhesitatingly, as of a fact ad-

mitting no doubt, that Shakspeare, among the English, is the most excellent for Comedy and Tragedy. Does any one of the other "excellent" dramatic writers of that day rise up to dispute the assertion, galling, perhaps, to the self-love of some amongst them? Not a voice is heard to tell Francis Meres that he has overstated the public opinion of the supremacy of Shakspeare. Thomas Heywood, one of this illustrious band, speaks of Meres as an approved good scholar, and says that his account of authors is learnedly done*. Heywood himself, indeed, in lines written long after Shakspeare's death, mentions him in stronger terms of praise than he applies to any of his contemporaries†. Lastly, Meres, after other comparisons of Shakspeare with the great writers of antiquity and of his own time, has these words, which nothing but a complete reliance upon the received opinion of his day could have warranted him in applying to any living man: "As Epius Stolo said that the Muses would speak with Plautus' tongue, if they would speak Latin; so I say that the Muses would speak with Shakspeare's fine filed phrase, if they would speak English."

Of the popularity of Shakspeare in his own day, the external evidence, such as it is, is more decisive than the testimony of any contemporary writer. He was at one and the same time the favourite of the people and of the Court. There is no record whatever known to exist of the public performances of Shakspeare's plays at his own theatres. Had such an account existed of the receipts at the Blackfriars and the Globe as Henslowe kept for his company, we should have known something precise of that popularity which was so extensive as to make the innkeeper of Bosworth, "full of ale and history," derive his knowledge from the stage of Shakspeare:—

* "Here I might take fit opportunity to reckon up all our English writers, and compare them with the Greek, French, Italian, and Latin poets, not only in their pastoral, historical, elegiacal, and heroical poems, but in their tragical and comical subjects, but it was my chance to happen on the like, learnedly done by an approved good scholar, in a book called 'Wits' Commonwealth,' to which treatise I wholly refer you, returning to our present subject."—'Apology for Actors,' 1612.

† 'Hierarchy of Blessed Angels,' 1635.

"For when he would have said, King Richard died,
And call'd, A horse, a horse! he Burbage cried."*

But the facts connected with the original publication of Shakspeare's plays sufficiently prove how eagerly they were for the most part received by the readers of the drama. From 1597 to 1600, ten of these plays were published from authentic copies, undoubtedly with the consent of the author. The system of publication did not commence before 1597; and, with four exceptions, it was not continued beyond 1600. Of these plays there were published, before the appearance of the collected edition of 1623, four editions of Richard II., six of The First Part of Henry IV., six of Richard III., four of Romeo and Juliet, six of Hamlet, besides repeated editions of the plays which were surreptitiously published—the maimed and imperfect copies described by the editors of the first folio. Of the thirty-six plays contained in the folio of 1623, only one-half were published, whether genuine or piratical, in the author's lifetime; and it is by no means improbable that many of those which were originally published with his concurrence were not permitted to be reprinted, because such publication might be considered injurious to the great theatrical property with which he was connected. But the constant demand for some of the plays is an evidence of their popularity which cannot be mistaken, and is decisive as to the people's admiration of Shakspeare. As for that of the Court, the testimony, imperfect as it is, is entirely conclusive.

"Sweet Swan of Avon! what a sight it were
To see thee in our waters yet appear,
And make those flights upon the banks of
Thames
That so did take Eliza and our James,"

is no vague homage from Jonson to the memory of his "beloved friend;" but the record of a fact. The accounts of the revels at Court, between the years 1588 and 1604, the most interesting period in the career of Shakspeare, have not been discovered in the

* Bishop Corbet, who died in 1635.

depositories for such papers. We have, indeed, memoranda of payments to her Majesty's players during this period, but nothing definite as to the plays represented. We know not what "so did take Eliza;" but we are left in no doubt as to the attractions for "our James." It appears from the Revels Book that, from Hallowmas-day, 1604, to the following Shrove Tuesday, there were thirteen plays performed before the King, eight of which were Shakspeare's, namely—"Othello," 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' 'Measure for Measure,' 'The Comedy of Errors,' 'Love's Labour's Lost,' 'Henry V.,' and 'The Merchant of Venice' twice, that being "again commanded by the King's Majesty." Not one of these, with the possible exception of 'Measure for Measure,' was recommended by its novelty. The series of the same accounts is broken from 1605 to 1611; and then from Hallowmas-night to Shrove Tuesday, which appears to have been the theatrical season of the Court, six different companies of players contribute to the amusements of Whitehall and Greenwich by the performance of twelve plays. Of five which are performed by the King's players, two are by Shakspeare: 'The Tempest,' and 'The Winter's Tale.' If the records were more perfect, this proof of the admiration of Shakspeare in the highest circle would, no doubt, be more conclusive. As it is, it is sufficient to support this general argument.*

During the life of Shakspeare, his surpassing popularity appears to have provoked no expression of envy from his contemporaries, no attempt to show that his reputation was built upon an unsolid foundation. Some of the later commentators upon Shakspeare, however, took infinite pains to prove that Jonson had ridiculed him during his life, and disparaged him after his death. Every one knows Fuller's delightful picture of the convivial exercises in mental strength between Jonson and Shakspeare:—"Many were the wit-combats between Shakspeare and Ben Jonson. I behold them like a Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war. Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher

* 'Extracts from the Accounts of the Revels at Court,' by Peter Cunningham.

in learning, solid but slow in his performances; Shakspeare, like the latter, less in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about, and take advantage of all winds by the quickness of his wit and invention." Few would imagine that a passage such as this should have been produced to prove that there was a quarrel between Jonson and Shakspeare; that the wit-combats of these intellectual gladiators were the consequence of their habitual enmity. By the same perverse misinterpretation have the commentators sought to prove that, when Jonson, in his prologues, put forth his own theory of dramatic art, he meant to satirize the principles upon which Shakspeare worked. It is held that in the prologue to 'Every Man in his Humour,' acted in 1598 at Shakspeare's own theatre, Jonson especially ridicules the historical plays of 'Henry VI.' and 'Richard III.' :—

"With three rusty swords,
And help of some few foot and half-foot words,
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars,
And in the tiring-house bring wounds to scars."

There is in another author a similar ridicule, and stronger, of the inadequacy of the stage to present a battle to the senses :—

"We shall much disgrace—
With four or five most vile and ragged foils,
Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous—
The name of Agincourt."

But Shakspeare himself was the author of this passage; and he was thus the satirist of himself, as much as Jonson was his satirist, when he compared, in his prologue, the comedy of manners with the historical and romantic drama which had then such attractions for the people. Shakspeare's Chorus to 'Henry V.,' from which we have made the last extract, was written the year after the performance of Jonson's play. We recognise in it a candid admission of the good sense of Jonson, which at once shows that Shakspeare was the last to feel the criticism as a personal attack. Nothing, in truth, can be more absurd than the attempts to show, from supposed allusions in Jonson, that he was an habitual detractor of Shakspeare. The reader will find these "proofs of Jonson's

malignity" brought forward, and dismissed with the contempt that they deserve, in a paper appended to Gifford's 'Memoir of Jonson.' The same acute critic had the merit of pointing out a passage in Jonson's 'Poetaster,' which, he says, "is as undoubtedly true of Shakspeare as if it were pointedly written to describe him." He further says, "It is evident that throughout the whole of this drama Jonson maintains a constant allusion to himself and his contemporaries," and that, consequently, the lines in question were intended for Shakspeare:—

"That which he hath writ
Is with such judgment labour'd and distill'd
Through all the needful uses of our lives,
That, could a man remember but his lines,
He should not touch at any serious point,
But he might breathe his spirit out of him.

* * * *

His learning savours not the school-like gloss
That most consists in echoing words and
terms,

And soonest wins a man an empty name;
Nor any long or far-fetch'd circumstance
Wrapp'd in the curious general'ties of art;
But a direct and analytic sum

Of all the worth and first effects of art.

And, for his poesy, 't is so ramm'd with life,
That it shall gather strength of life, with
being,

And live hereafter more admired than now."*

We have already noticed the expression of Jonson to Drummond, that "Shakspeare wanted art."† It is impossible to receive Jonson's words as any support of the absurd opinion, so long propagated, that Shakspeare worked without labour and without method. Jonson's own testimony, delivered five years after the conversation with Drummond, offers the most direct evidence against such a construction of his expression:—

"Yet must I not give Nature all: thy art,
My gentle Shakspeare, must enjoy a part.
For though the poet's matter Nature be,
His art doth give the fashion: and that he
Who casts to write a living line must sweat
(Such as thine are), and strike the second heat

* 'The Poetaster,' Act v. Sc. i.

† Book viii. ch. i. p. 369.

Upon the Muses' anvil: turn the same
(And himself with it) that he thinks to frame;
Or, for the laurel, he may gain a scorn,—
For a good poet's made as well as born:
And such wert thou."

There can be no difficulty in understanding Jonson's dispraise of Shakspeare, small as it was, when we look at the different characters of the two men. In his 'Discoveries,' written in his last years, there is the following passage:—"I remember, the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakspeare, that in his writing, whatsoever he penned, he never blotted out a line. My answer had been, Would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candour: for I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent phantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped: *Sufflaminandus erat*, as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too." The players had said, in their preface to the first folio—"His mind and hand went together; and what he thought he uttered with that easiness that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers." Jonson, no doubt, alludes to this assertion. But we are not, therefore, to understand that Shakspeare took no pains in perfecting what, according to the notions of his editors, he delivered with such easiness. The differences between the earlier and the later copies of some of his plays show the unremitting care and the exquisite judgment with which he revised his productions. The expression "without a blot" might, nevertheless, be perfectly true; and the fact, no doubt, impressed upon the minds of Heminge and Condell what they were desirous to impress upon others, that Shakspeare was a writer of unequalled facility—"as he was a happy imitator of nature, he was a most

gentle expresser of it." Jonson received this evidence of facility as a reproof to his own laborious mode of composition. He felt proud, and wisely so, of the commendations of his admirers, that his works cost him much sweat and much oil; and when the players told him that Shakspeare never blotted out a line, he had his self-satisfied retort, "Would he had blotted a thousand." But this carelessness, as it appeared to Jonson,—this exuberant facility, as the players thought,—was in itself no proof that Shakspeare did not elaborate his works with the nicest care. The same thing was said of Fletcher as of him. Humphrey Moseley, the publisher of Beaumont and Fletcher's works in 1647, says—"Whatever I have seen of Mr. Fletcher's own hand is free from interlining, and his friends affirm he never writ any one thing twice." But the stationer does not put this forth as any proof of carelessness; for he most judiciously adds, "It seems he had that rare felicity to prepare and perfect all first in his own brain, to shape and attire his notions, to add or lop off before he committed one word to writing, and never touched pen till all was to stand as firm and immutable as if engraven in brass or marble." This is the way, we believe, in which all works of great originality are built up. If Shakspeare blotted not a line, it was because he wrote not till he had laid the foundations, and formed the plan, and conceived the ornaments, of his wondrous edifices. The execution of the work was then an easy thing; and the facility was the beautiful result of the previous labour.

But if Jonson expressed himself a little petulantly, and perhaps inconsiderately, about the boast of the players, surely nothing can be nobler than the hearty tribute which he pays to the memory of Shakspeare:—"I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any." Unquestionably this is language which shows that the memory of Shakspeare was cherished by others even to idolatry; so that Jonson absolutely adopts an apologetical tone in venturing an observation which can scarcely be considered disparaging—"he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was neces-

sary he should be stopped." It was the facility that excited Jonson's critical comparison of Shakspeare with himself; and it was in the same way that, when he wrote his noble verses "To the Memory of my Beloved Mr. William Shakespeare and what he hath left us," he could not avoid drawing a comparison between his own profound scholarship and Shakspeare's practical learning:—

"If I thought my judgment were of years,
I should commit thee surely with thy peers,
And tell how far thou didst our Lyly outshine,
Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's mighty line.
And though thou hadst small Latin and less
Greek,
From thence to honour thee I will not seek
For names: but call forth thund'ring Eschylus,
Euripides, and Sophocles to us,
Pacuvius, Accius, him of Cordova dead,
To live again, to hear thy buskin tread
And shake a stage: or, when thy socks were
on,
Leave thee alone for the comparison
Of all that insolent Greece or haughty Rome
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.

* * * * *

Nature herself was proud of his designs,
And joy'd to wear the dressing of his lines!
Which were so richly spun, and woven so fit,
As, since, she will vouchsafe no other wit.
The merry Greek, tart Aristophanes,
Neat Terence, witty Plautus, now not please,
But antiquated and deserted lie,
As they were not of Nature's family."

The interpretation of this passage is certainly not difficult. Its general sense is expressed by Gifford:—"Jonson not only sets Shakspeare above his contemporaries, but above the ancients, whose works himself idolized, and of whose genuine merits he was perhaps a more competent judge than any scholar of his age."* The entire passage was unquestionably meant for praise, whatever opinion might be implied in it as to Shakspeare's learning. Looking to the whole construction and tendency of the passage, it may even be doubted whether Jonson intended to express a direct opinion as to Shakspeare's philological attainments. If we paraphrase

* 'Jonson's Works,' vol. viii. p. 333.

the passage according to the common notion, it reads thus:—And although you knew little Latin and less Greek, to honour thee out of Latin and Greek I will not seek for names. According to this construction, the poet ought to have written, *because* “thou hadst small Latin,” &c. But without any violence the passage may be read thus:—And *although* thou hadst in thy writings few images derived from Latin, and fewer from Greek authors, I will not thence (on that account) seek for names to honour thee, but call forth thundering Æschylus, &c. It is perfectly clear that Jonson meant to say, and not disparagingly, that Shakspeare was not an imitator. Immediately after the mention of Aristophanes, Terence, and Plautus, he adds,

“Yet must I not give Nature all.”

The same tone of commendation was taken in Shakspeare's time by other writers. Digges says that he neither borrows from the Greeks, imitates the Latins, nor translates from vulgar languages. Drayton has these lines:—

“Shakespeare, thou hadst as smooth a comic vein,
Fitting the sock, and in thy natural brain
As strong conception, and as clear a rage,
As any one that traffick'd with the stage.”*

To argue from such passages that the writers meant to reproach Shakspeare as an ignorant or even as an unlearned man, in the common sense of the word, was an absurdity that was not fully propounded to the world till the discovery of Dr. Farmer, that, because translations existed from Latin, Italian, and French authors in the time of Shakspeare, he was incapable of consulting the originals. This profound logician closes his judicial sentence with the following memorable words, which have become the true faith of some antiquarian critics up to this hour:—“He remembered perhaps enough of his schoolboy learning to put the Hig, hag, hog, into the mouth of Sir Hugh Evans, and

* Farmer, the most insolent of the race of piddling black-letter bibliographers, has the profligacy not to quote these lines, but to say, “Drayton, the countryman and acquaintance of Shakspeare, determines his excellence to the natural brain *only*.”

might pick up in the writers of the time, or the course of his conversation, a familiar phrase or two of French or Italian.” There is, however, a contemporary testimony to the acquirements of Shakspeare which is of somewhat higher value than the assertions of any master “of all such reading as was never read”—of one, himself a true poet, who holds that all Shakspeare's excellences were his freehold, but that his cunning brain improved his natural gifts:—

“This and much more which cannot be express'd

But by himself, his tongue and his own breast,
Was Shakespeare's *freehold*, which his *cunning*
brain

Improved by favour of the ninefold train.

The buskin'd Muse, the Comic Queen, the grand

And louder tone of Clio; nimble hand,

And nimbler foot of the melodious pair;

The silver-voiced Lady; the most fair

Calliope, whose speaking silence daunts,

And she whose praise the heavenly body
chants;—

These jointly woo'd him, envying one another,
(Obey'd by all as spouse, but loved as brother,
And wrought a curious robe of sable grave,
Fresh green, and pleasant yellow, red most
brave,

And constant blue, rich purple, guiltless
white,

The lowly russet, and the scarlet bright;

Branch'd and embroider'd like the painted
spring,

Each leaf match'd with a flower, and each
string

Of golden wire, each line of silk; there run

Italian works whose thread the sisters spun;

And there did sing, or seem to sing, the
choice

Birds of a foreign note and various voice.

Here hangs a mossy rock; there plays a fair

But chiding fountain purled: not the air,

Nor clouds, nor thunder, but were living
drawn,

Not out of common tiffany or lawn,

But fine materials, which the Muses know,

And only know the countries where they
grow.”†

† Commendatory Verses, ‘On Worthy Master Shakspeare and his Poems,’ by I. M. S.

But if the passage which we have previously quoted from 'The Poetaster' be, as Gifford so plausibly imagined, intended for Shakspeare, it is decisive as to Jonson's own opinion of his great friend's acquirements: it is the opinion of every man, now, who is not a slave to the authority of the smallest minds that ever undertook to measure the vast poetical region of Shakspeare with their little tape, inch by inch:—

"His learning savours not the school-like gloss
That most consists in echoing words and
terms,
And soonest wins a man an empty name."

The verses of Jonson, prefixed to the folio of 1623, conclude with these remarkable lines:—

"Shine forth, thou star of poets, and with rage,
Or influence, chide, or cheer, the drooping
stage;
Which, since thy flight from hence, hath
mourn'd like night,
And despairs day, but for thy volume's light."

From 1616, the year of Shakspeare's death, to 1623, the date of the first edition of his collected works, Jonson himself had written nothing for the stage. Beaumont had died the year before Shakspeare; but Fletcher alone was sustaining the high reputation which he had won with his accomplished associate. Massinger had been in London from 1606, known certainly to have written in conjunction with other dramatists before the period of Shakspeare's death, and, without doubt, assisting to fill the void which he had left; for 'The Bondman' appears in the list of the Master of the Revels in 1623. The indefatigable Thomas Heywood was a writer for the stage from the commencement of the seventeenth century to the suppression of the theatres. Webster was a poet of Shakspeare's own theatre, immediately after his death, and a leading character in 'The Duchess of Malfi' was played by Burbage. Rowley produced some of his best works at the same period. Chapman had not ceased to write. Ford was known as a rising poet. Many others were there of genius and learning who at this particular time were struggling for the honours of the drama, and some with

great success. And yet Jonson does not hesitate to say, that since the death of Shakspeare the stage mourns like night. Leonard Digges, writing at the date of the publication of the folio, says of Shakspeare's dramas,—

"Happy verse, thou shalt be sung and heard,
When hungry quills shall be such honour
barr'd.
Then vanish, upstart writers to each stage,
You needy poetasters of this age!"

This man speaks authoritatively, because he speaks the public voice. But it is not with the poetasters only that he compares the popularity of Shakspeare; he tells us that the players of the Globe live by him dead; and that prime judgments, rich veins,

"have fared

The worst with this deceased man compared;"

and he then proceeds to exhibit the precise character of the popular admiration of Shakspeare:—

"So have I seen, when Cæsar would appear,
And on the stage at half-sword parley were
Brutus and Cassius, O, how the audience
Were ravish'd! with what wonder they went
thence!

When, some new day, they would not brook a
line

Of tedious, though well-labour'd, Catiline;
Sejanus too was irksome: they prized more
'Honest' Iago, or the jealous Moor.

And though the Fox and subtle Alchymist,
Long intermitted, could not long be miss'd,
Though these have shamed all th' ancients,
and might raise

Their author's merit with a crown of bays,
Yet these sometimes, even at a friend's desire
Acted, have scarce defray'd the sea-coal fire
And door-keepers: when, let but Falstaff
come,

Hal, Poins, the rest,—you scarce shall have a
room,

All is so pester'd: Let but Beatrice
And Benedict be seen, lo! in a trice

The cockpit, galleries, boxes, all are full,
To hear Malvolio, that cross-garter'd gull.

Brief, there is nothing in his wit-fraught
book,

Whose sound we would not hear, on whose
worth look:

Like old-coin'd gold, whose lines in every
page
Shall pass true current to succeeding age."

We have said enough, we think, to show how inconsiderate is the assertion, that Shakspeare's "pre-eminence was not acknowledged by his contemporaries." Should this fact, however, be still thought to be a matter of opinion, we will place the opinion of a real critic, not the less sound for being an enthusiastic admirer, against this echo of

the babble of the cold and arrogant school of criticism that has still some small disciples and imitators: "Clothed in radiant armour, and authorised by titles sure and manifold as a poet, Shakspeare came forward to demand the throne of fame, as the dramatic poet of England. *His excellences compelled even his contemporaries to seat him on that throne, although there were giants in those days contending for the same honour.*"*

* Coleridge's 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 53.

BOOK X.

THE SONNETS.

THE original edition of this collection of poems bore the following title:—'Shakspeare's Sonnets. Never before imprinted. At London, by G. Eld, for T. T., and are to be sold by John Wright, dwelling at Christ Church-gate. 1609.' The volume is a small quarto. In addition to the Sonnets it contains, at the end, 'A Lover's Complaint. By William Shake-speare.' In this collection the Sonnets are numbered from 1 to 154. Although the arrangement of the Sonnets in this first edition is now the only one adopted in editions of Shakspeare's Poems, another order occasionally prevailed up to the time of the publication of Steevens's fac-simile reprint of the Sonnets in 1766. An interval of thirty-one years elapsed between the publication of the volume by T. T. (Thomas Thorpe) in 1609, and the demand for a reprint of these remarkable poems. In 1640 appeared 'Poems, written by Wil. Shake-speare, Gent. Printed at London by Tho. Cotes, and are to be sold by John Benson.' This volume, in duodecimo, contains the Sonnets, but in a totally different order, the original arrangement not only being de-

parted from, but the lyrical poems of 'The Passionate Pilgrim' scattered here and there, and sometimes a single Sonnet, sometimes two or three, and more rarely four or five, distinguished by some quaint title. No title includes more than five. In the editions of the Poems which appeared during a century afterwards, the original order of the Sonnets was adopted in some—that of the edition of 1640 in others. Lintot's, in 1709, for example, adheres to the original; Curll's, in 1710, follows the second edition. Cotes, the printer of the second edition, was also the printer of the second edition of the plays. That the principle of arrangement adopted in Cotes' edition was altogether arbitrary, and proceeded upon a false conception of many of these poems, we can have no hesitation in believing; but it is remarkable that within twenty-four years of Shakspeare's death an opinion should have existed that the original arrangement was also arbitrary, and that the Sonnets were essentially that collection of *fragments* which Meres described in 1598, when he wrote, "As the soul of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pytha-

goras, so the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakspeare: witness his 'Venus and Adonis,' his 'Lucrece,' his sugared Sonnets *among his private friends*." Upon the question of the continuity of the Sonnets depend many important considerations with reference to the life and personal character of the poet; and it is necessary, therefore, to examine that question with proportionate care.

The Sonnets of Shakspeare are distinguished from the general character of that class of poems by the continuity manifestly existing in many successive stanzas, which form, as it were, a group of flowers of the same hue and fragrance. Mr. Hallam has justly explained this peculiarity:—

"No one ever entered more fully than Shakspeare into the character of this species of poetry, which admits of no expletive imagery, no merely ornamental line. But though each Sonnet has generally its proper unity, the sense—I do not mean the grammatical construction—will sometimes be found to spread from one to another, independently of that repetition of the leading idea, like variations of an air, which a series of them frequently exhibits, and on account of which they have latterly been reckoned by some rather an integral poem than a collection of Sonnets. But this is not uncommon among the Italians, and belongs, in fact, to those of Petrarch himself."

But, although a series may frequently exhibit a "repetition of the leading idea, like variations of an air," it by no means follows that they are to be therefore considered "rather an integral poem than a collection of Sonnets." In the edition of 1640 the "variations" were arbitrarily separated, in many cases, from the "air;" but, on the other hand, it is scarcely conceivable that in the earlier edition of 1609 these verses were intended to be presented as "an integral poem." Before we examine this matter, let us inquire into some of the circumstances connected with the original publication.

The first seventeen Sonnets contain a "leading idea" under every form of "variation." They are an exhortation to a friend, a male friend, to marry. Who this

friend was has been the subject of infinite discussion. Chalmers maintains that it was Queen Elizabeth, and that there was no impropriety in Shakspeare addressing the queen by the masculine pronoun, because a queen is a prince; as we still say in the Liturgy, "our queen and governor." The reasoning of Chalmers on this subject, which may be found in his 'Supplementary Apology,' is one of the most amusing pieces of learned and ingenious nonsense that ever met our view. We believe that we must very summarily dismiss Queen Elizabeth. But Chalmers with more reason threw over the idea that the dedication of the bookseller to the edition of 1609 implied the person to whom the Sonnets were addressed. T. T., who dedicates, is, as we have mentioned, Thomas Thorpe, the publisher. W. H., to whom the dedication is addressed, was, according to the earlier critics, an humble person. He was either William Harte, the poet's nephew, or William Hews, some unknown individual; but Drake said, and said truly, that the person addressed in some of the Sonnets themselves was one of rank; and he maintained that it was Lord Southampton. "W. H.," he said, ought to have been H. W.—Henry Wriothesley. But Mr. Boaden and Mr. Brown have subsequently affirmed that "W. H." is William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, who, in his youth and his rank, exactly corresponded with the person addressed by the poet. The words "begetter of these Sonnets," in the dedication, must mean, it is maintained, the person who was the immediate cause of their being written—to whom they were addressed. But *he* was "the *only* begetter of these Sonnets." The latter portion of the Sonnets are unquestionably addressed to a female, which at once disposes of the assertion that he was the *only* begetter, assuming the "begetter" to be used in the sense of *inspirer*. Chalmers disposes of this meaning of the word very cleverly:—"W. H. was the bringer forth of the Sonnets. *Beget* is derived by Skinner from the Anglo-Saxon *begettan*, *obtinere*. Johnson adopts this derivation and sense: so that *begetter*, in the quaint language of Thorpe the bookseller, Pistol the ancient, and such affected persons,

signified the *obtainer*: as to *get* and *getter*, in the present day, mean *obtain* and *obtainer*, or to procure and the procurer." But then, on the other hand, it is held that, when the bookseller wishes Mr. W. H. "that eternity promised by our ever-living poet," he means promised *him*. This inference we must think is somewhat strained. Be this as it may, the material question to examine is this—are the greater portion of the Sonnets, putting aside those which manifestly apply to a female, or females, addressed to *one* male friend? Or are these the "sugared Sonnets" scattered among *many* "private friends?" When Meres printed his 'Palladis Tamia,' in 1598, there can be no doubt that Shakspeare's Sonnets, then existing only in manuscript, had obtained a reputation in the literary and courtly circles of that time. Probably the notoriety which Meres had given to the "sugared Sonnets" excited a publisher, in 1599, to produce something which should gratify the general curiosity. In that year appeared a collection of poems bearing the name of Shakspeare, and published by W. Jaggard, entitled 'The Passionate Pilgrim.' This little collection contains two Sonnets which are also given in the larger collection of 1609. They are those numbered 138 and 144 in that collection. In the modern reprints of 'The Passionate Pilgrim' it is usual to omit these two Sonnets without explanation, because they have been previously given in the larger collection of Sonnets. But it is essential to bear in mind the fact that in 1599 two of the Sonnets of the hundred and fifty-four published in 1609 were printed; and that one of them especially, the one numbered 144, has been held to form an important part of the supposed "integral poem." We may therefore conclude that the other Sonnets which appear to relate to the same persons as are referred to in the 144th Sonnet were also in existence. Further, the publication of these Sonnets in 1599 tends to remove the impression that might be derived from the tone of some of those in the larger collection of 1609,—that they were written when Shakspeare had passed the middle period of life. For example, in the 73rd Sonnet the poet refers to

the autumn of his years, the twilight of his day, the ashes of his youth. In the 138th, printed in 1599, he describes himself as "past the best"—as "old." He was then thirty-five. Dante was exactly this age when he described himself in "the midway of this our mortal life." In these remarkable particulars, therefore,—the mention of two persons real or fictitious, who occupy an important position in the larger collection, and in the notice of the poet's age,—the two Sonnets of 'The Passionate Pilgrim' are strictly connected with those published in 1609, of which they also form a part; and they lead to the conclusion that they were obtained for publication out of the scattered leaves floating about amongst "private friends." The publication of 'The Passionate Pilgrim' was unquestionably unauthorised and piratical. The publisher got all he could which existed in manuscript; and he took two poems out of 'Love's Labour's Lost,' which was printed only the year before. In 1609, we have no hesitation in believing that the same process was repeated; that without the consent of the writer the hundred and fifty-four Sonnets—some forming a continuous poem, or poems; others isolated, in the subjects to which they relate, and the persons to whom they were addressed—were collected together without any key to their arrangement, and given to the public. Believing as we do that "W. H.," be he who he may, who put these poems in the hands of "T. T.," the publisher, arranged them in the most arbitrary manner (of which there are many proofs), we believe that the assumption of continuity, however ingeniously it may be maintained, is altogether fallacious. Where is the difficulty of imagining, with regard to poems of which each separate poem, sonnet, or stanza, is either a "leading idea," or its "variation," that, picked up as we think they were from many quarters, the supposed connexion must be in many respects fanciful, in some a result of chance, mixing what the poet wrote in his own person, either in moments of elation or depression, with other apparently continuous stanzas that painted an imaginary character, indulging in all the warmth of an ex-

aggerated friendship, in the complaints of an abused confidence, in the pictures of an unhallowed and unhappy love; sometimes speaking with the real earnestness of true friendship and a modest estimation of his own merits; sometimes employing the language of an extravagant eulogy, and a more extravagant estimation of the powers of the man who was writing that eulogy? Suppose, for example, that in the leisure hours, we will say, of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and William Shakspeare, the poet should have undertaken to address to the youth an argument why he should marry. Without believing the Earl to be the W. H. of the Dedication, we know that he was a friend of Shakspeare. There is nothing in the first seventeen Sonnets which might not have been written in the artificial tone of the Italian poetry, in the working out of this scheme. Suppose, again, that in other Sonnets the poet, in the same artificial spirit, complains that the friend has robbed him of his mistress, and avows that he forgives the falsehood. There is nothing in all this which might not have been written essentially as a work of fiction,—received as a work of fiction,—handed about amongst “private friends” without the slightest apprehension that it would be regarded as an exposition of the private relations of two persons separated in rank as they probably were in their habitual intimacies,—of very different ages,—the one an avowedly profligate boy, the other a matured man. But this supposition does not exclude the idea that the poet had also, at various times, composed, in the same measure, other poems, truly expressing his personal feelings,—with nothing inflated in their tone, perfectly simple and natural, offering praise, expressing love to his actual friends (in the language of the time “lovers”), showing regret in separation, dreading unkindness, hopeful of continued affection. These are also circulated amongst “private friends.” Some “W. H.” collects them together, ten, or twelve, or fifteen years after they have been written; and a publisher, of course, is found to give to the world any productions of a man so eminent as Shakspeare. But who

arranged them? Certainly not the poet himself: for those who believe in their continuity must admit that there are portions which it is impossible to regard as continuous. In the same volume with these Sonnets was published a most exquisite narrative poem, ‘A Lover’s Complaint.’ The form of it entirely prevents any attempts to consider it autobiographical. The Sonnets, on the contrary, are personal in their form; but it is not therefore to be assumed that they are *all* personal in their relation to the author. It is impossible to be assumed that they could have been printed with the consent of the author as they now stand. If he had meant in all of them to express his actual feelings and position, the very slightest labour on his part—a few words of introduction either in prose or verse—would have taken those parts which he would have naturally desired to appear like fiction, and which to us even now look like fiction, out of the possible range of reality. The same slight labour would, on the other hand, have classed amongst the real, apart from the artificial, those Sonnets which he would have desired to stand apart, and which appear to us to stand apart, as the result of genuine moods of the poet’s own mind.

It is our intention, without at all presuming to think that we have discovered any real order in which these extraordinary productions may be arranged, to offer them to the reader upon a principle of classification, which, on the one hand, does not attempt to reject the idea that a continuous poem, or rather several continuous poems, may be traced throughout the series, nor adopt the belief that the whole can be broken up into fragments; but which, on the other hand, does no violence to the meaning of the author by a pertinacious adherence to a principle of continuity, sometimes obvious enough, but at other times maintained by links as fragile as the harness of Queen Mab’s chariot:—

“Her traces of the smallest spider’s web,
Her collars of the moonshine’s watery beams.”

The reader will have the ordinary text before him in every modern edition of Shak-

spere containing 'The Poems;' and he will be enabled at every step to judge whether the original arrangement, to which we must constantly refer, was a systematic or an arbitrary one.

I.

The earliest productions of a youthful poet are commonly Love-Sonnets, or Elegies as they were termed in Shakspeare's time. The next *age* to that of the school-boy is that of

"the lover,

Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow."

We commence our series with three Sonnets which certainly bear the marks of juvenility, when compared with others in this collection, as distinctly impressed upon them as the character of the poet's mind at different periods of his life is impressed upon 'Love's Labour's Lost' and 'Macbeth:—

Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy will,
And will to boot, and will in over-plus;
More than enough am I that vex thee still,
To thy sweet will making addition thus.
Wilt thou, whose will is large and spacious,
Not once vouchsafe to hide my will in thine?
Shall will in others seem right gracious,
And in my will no fair acceptance shine?
The sea, all water, yet receives rain still,
And in abundance addeth to his store;
So thou, being rich in will, add to thy will
One will of mine, to make thy large will more.

Let no unkind, no fair beseechers kill;
Think all but one, and me in that one *Will*.

—135.

If thy soul check thee that I come so near,
Swear to thy blind soul that I was thy *Will*,
And will, thy soul knows, is admitted there;
Thus far for love, my love-suit, sweet, fulfil.
Will will fulfil the treasure of thy love,
Ay, fill it full with wills, and my will one,
In things of great receipt with ease we prove;
Among a number one is reckoned none.
Then in the number let me pass untold,
Though in thy stores' account I one must be;
For nothing hold me, so it please thee hold
That nothing me, a something sweet to thee:

Make but my name thy love, and love that
still,

And then thou lov'st me,—for my name is
Will.—136.

Lo, as a careful housewife runs to catch
One of her feather'd creatures broke away,
Sets down her babe, and makes all swift
despatch

In pursuit of the thing she would have stay;
Whilst her neglected child holds her in chace,
Cries to catch her whose busy care is bent
To follow that which flies before her face,
Not prizing her poor infant's discontent;
So runn'st thou after that which flies from
thee,

Whilst I thy babe chase thee afar behind;
But, if thou catch thy hope, turn back to me,
And play the mother's part, kiss me, be kind:

So will I pray that thou mayst have thy
Will,

If thou turn back, and my loud crying still.
—143.

The figures which we subjoin to each Sonnet show the place which it occupies in the collection of 1609. If the reader will turn to the reprints of that text, he will see where these Sonnets, through each of which the same play upon the poet's name is kept up with a boyish vivacity, are found. The first two follow one of those from which Mr. Brown derives the title of what he calls 'The Sixth Poem,' being 'To his Mistress, on her Infidelity.*' Mr. Brown, however, qualifies the dissimilarity of tone by the following admission:—"All the stanzas in the preceding poems (to Stanza 126) are retained in their original order; the printers, without disturbing the links, having done no worse than the joining together of five chains into one. But I suspect the same attention has not been paid to this address to his mistress. Indeed, I farther suspect that some stanzas, irrelevant to the subject, have been introduced into the body of it." The stanzas to which Mr. Brown objects are the 135th and 136th, just given. But let us proceed. The poet now sings the praise of those eyes which so took his brother-poet, Phineas Fletcher:—

* 'Shakspeare's Autobiographical Poems,' p. 96.

"But most I wonder how that *jetty* ray,
Which those two *blackest suns* do fair display,
Should shine so bright, and night should make
so sweet a day."

We know not the colour of Anne Hathaway's eyes; but how can we affirm that the following three Sonnets were not addressed to her?—

In the old age black was not counted fair,
Or, if it were, it bore not beauty's name;
But now is black beauty's successive heir,
And beauty slander'd with a bastard shame:
For since each hand hath put on nature's
power,

Fairing the foul with art's false borrow'd
face,

Sweet beauty hath no name, no holy hour,
But is profaned, if not lives in disgrace.
Therefore my mistress' eyes are raven black,
Her eyes so suited; and they mourners seem
At such, who, not born fair, no beauty lack,
Slandering creation with a false esteem:

Yet so they mourn, becoming of their woe,
That every tongue says beauty should look
so.—127.

Thou art as tyrannous, so as thou art,
As those whose beauties proudly make them
cruel:

For well thou know'st to my dear dotting
heart

Thou art the fairest and most precious jewel.
Yet, in good faith, some say that thee behold,
Thy face hath not the power to make love
groan:

To say they err, I dare not be so bold,
Although I swear it to myself alone.

And, to be sure that is not false I swear,
A thousand groans, but thinking on thy face,
One on another's neck, do witness bear

Thy black is fairest in my judgment's place.

In nothing art thou black, save in thy
deeds,

And thence this slander, as I think, pro-
ceeds.—131.

Thine eyes I love, and they, as pitying me,
Knowing thy heart, torment me with dis-
dain;

Have put on black, and loving mourners be,
Looking with pretty ruth upon my pain.

And truly not the morning sun of heaven
Better becomes the gray cheeks of the east,

Nor that full star that ushers in the even,
Doth half that glory to the sober west,
As those two mourning eyes become thy face:
O, let it then as well beseech thy heart
To mourn for me, since mourning doth thee
grace,

And suit thy pity like in every part.

Then will I swear beauty herself is black,
And all they foul that thy complexion lack.

—132.

But the last two immediately precede the
Sonnets beginning

"Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to
groan,

For that deep wound it gives my friend and
me:"—

and so the lady of the "mourning eyes" is
associated with a tale of treachery and sin.
The line of the 131st Sonnet,

"In nothing art thou black, *save in thy deeds*,"
may be held to imply something atrocious.
The first two lines, however, show of what
the poet-lover complains:—

"Thou art as *tyrannous*, so as thou art,
As those whose beauties proudly make them
cruel."

The 128th Sonnet has never been exceeded
in airy elegance, even by the professed writers
of amatory poems:—

How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st,
Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds
With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently
sway'st

The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,
Do I envy those jacks, that nimble leap
To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,
Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest
reap,

At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand!
To be so tickled, they would change their state
And situation with those dancing chips,
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,
Making dead wood more bless'd than living
lips.

Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

—128.

The 130th, too, is one of the prettiest *vers
de société* that a Suckling, or a Moore, could
have produced:—

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun ;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red ;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are
dun ;

If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her
head.

I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks ;
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress
reeks.

I love to hear her speak,—yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound ;
I grant I never saw a goddess go,—

My mistress, when she walks, treads on the
ground :

And yet, by heaven, I think my love as
rare

As any she belied with false compare.—
130.

And of what character is the 129th Sonnet,
which separates these two playful composi-
tions? It is a solemn denunciation against
unlicensed gratifications—a warning

“To shun the heaven that leads men to this
hell.”

If we are to bring those Sonnets in apposi-
tion where the “leading idea” is repeated,
we shall have to go far back to find one that
will accord with the 130th:—

So is it not with me as with that muse,
Stirr'd by a painted beauty to his verse ;
Who heaven itself for ornament doth use,
And every fair with his fair doth rehearse ;
Making a couplement of proud compare,
With sun and moon, with earth and sea's rich
gems,

With April's first-born flowers, and all things
rare

That heaven's air in his huge rondure hems.

O let me, true in love, but truly write,

And then believe me, my love is as fair

As any mother's child, though not so bright

As those gold candles fixed in heaven's air :

Let them say more that like of hearsay
well ;

I will not praise, that purpose not to sell.

—21.

This is the 21st Sonnet ; and it has as much
the character of a love-sonnet as any we
have just given.

The *tyranny* of which the poet complains
in the 131st Sonnet forms the subject of the
three following:—

O, call not me to justify the wrong

That my unkindness lays upon my heart ;

Wound me not with thine eye, but with thy
tongue ;

Use power with power, and slay me not by
art.

Tell me thou lov'st elsewhere ; but, in my
sight,

Dear heart, forbear to glance thine eye aside.

What need'st thou wound with cunning, when
thy might

Is more than my o'erpress'd defence can 'bide ?

Let me excuse thee : ah ! my love well knows

Her pretty looks have been my enemies ;

And therefore from my face she turns my
foes,

That they elsewhere might dart their injuries :

Yet do not so ; but, since I am near slain,

Kill me outright with looks, and rid my
pain.—139.

Be wise as thou art cruel : do not press

My tongue-tied patience with too much dis-
dain ;

Lest sorrow lend me words, and words ex-
press

The manner of my pity-wanting pain.

If I might teach thee wit, better it were,

Though not to love, yet, love, to tell me so ;

(As testy sick men, when their deaths be
near,

No news but health from their physicians
know ;)

For, if I should despair, I should grow mad,

And in my madness might speak ill of thee :

Now this ill-wresting world is grown so bad,

Mad slanderers by mad ears believed be.

That I may not be so, nor thou belied,

Bear thine eyes straight, though thy proud
heart go wide.—140.

Canst thou, O cruel ! say I love thee not,

When I, against myself, with thee partake ?

Do I not think on thee, when I forgot

Am of myself, all tyrant, for thy sake ?

Who hateth thee that I do call my friend ?

On whom frown'st thou that I do fawn upon ?

Nay, if thou low'r'st on me, do I not spend

Revenge upon myself with present moan ?

What merit do I in myself respect,

That is so proud thy service to despise,

When all my best doth worship thy defect,
 Commanded by the motion of thine eyes?
 But, love, hate on, for now I know thy
 mind;
 Those that can see thou lov'st, and I am
 blind.—149.

And yet the tyranny is meekly borne by the
 lover:—

Being your slave, what should I do but tend
 Upon the hours and times of your desire?
 I have no precious time at all to spend,
 Nor services to do, till you require.
 Nor dare I chide the world-without-end hour,
 Whilst I, my sovereign, watch the clock for
 you,
 Nor think the bitterness of absence sour,
 When you have bid your servant once adieu;
 Nor dare I question with my jealous thought
 Where you may be, or your affairs suppose,
 But, like a sad slave, stay and think of
 nought,
 Save, where you are how happy you make
 those:
 So true a fool is love, that in your will
 (Though you do anything) he thinks no
 ill.—57.

That God forbid, that made me first your
 slave,
 I should in thought control your times of
 pleasure,
 Or at your hand the account of hours to
 crave,
 Being your vassal, bound to stay your leisure!
 O, let me suffer (being at your beck)
 The imprison'd absence of your liberty,
 And patience, tame to sufferance, bide each
 check
 Without accusing you of injury.
 Be where you list; your charter is so strong,
 That you yourself may privilege your time:
 Do what you will, to you it doth belong
 Yourself to pardon of self-doing crime.
 I am to wait, though waiting so be hell;
 Not blame your pleasure, be it ill or well.
 —58.

The Sonnets last given are the 57th and
 58th. These are especially noticed by Mr.
 Brown as evidence that the person to whom
 he considers the Sonnets are addressed—W.
 H.—was “a man of rank.” He adds, “Re-
 proach is conveyed more forcibly, and, at

the same time, with more kindness, in their
 strained humility, than it would have been
 by direct expostulation.” The reproach,
 according to Mr. Brown, is for the “cold-
 ness” which the noble youth had evinced
 towards his friend. The “coldness” is im-
 plied in these stanzas, and in that which
 precedes them:—

“Sweet love, renew thy force; be it not said
 Thy edge should blunter be than appetite,
 Which but to-day by feeding is allay'd,
 To-morrow sharpen'd in his former might:
 So, love, be thou: although to-day thou fill
 The hungry eyes, even till they wink with
 fulness,
 To-morrow see again, and do not kill
 The spirit of love with a perpetual dulness.
 Let this sad interim like the ocean be
 Which parts the shore, where two contracted-
 new
 Come daily to the banks, that, when they see
 Return of love, more bless'd may be the view;
 Or call it winter, which, being full of care,
 Makes summer's welcome thrice more
 wish'd, more rare.—56.

We believe, on the contrary, that the three
 Sonnets are addressed to a female. It ap-
 pears to us that a line in the 57th is deci-
 sive upon this:—

“When you have bid your *servant* once adieu.”

The lady was *the mistress*, the lover *the servant*, in the gallantry of Shakspeare's time.
 In Beaumont and Fletcher's ‘Scornful Lady’
 we have, “Was I not once your mistress,
 and you *my servant*?” The three stanzas,
 56, 57, 58, are completely isolated from what
 precedes and what follows them; and there-
 fore we have no hesitation in transposing
 them to this class.

We are about to give a Sonnet which Mr.
 Brown thinks “should be expunged from
 the poem.” We should regret to lose so
 pretty and playful a love-verse:—

Those lips that Love's own hand did make
 Breathed forth the sound that said *I hate*,
 To me that languish'd for her sake:
 But, when she saw my woeful state,
 Straight in her heart did mercy come,
 Chiding that tongue, that ever sweet
 Was used in giving gentle doom;
 And taught it thus anew to greet:

I hate she altered with an end,
That followed it as gentle day
Doth follow night, who like a fiend
From heaven to hell is flown away.

I hate from hate away she threw,
And saved my life, saying—*not you*.—145.

It is, however, strangely opposed to the theory of continuity; for it occurs between the Sonnet which first appeared in 'The Passionate Pilgrim'—

"Two loves I have, of comfort and despair"—
and the magnificent lines beginning

"Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth."

This sublime Sonnet Mr. Brown would also expunge. This is a hard sentence against it for being out of place. We shall endeavour to remove it to fitter company.

We have now very much reduced the number of stanzas which Mr. Brown assigns to the Sixth Poem, entitled by him, 'To his Mistress, on her Infidelity.' There are only twenty-six stanzas in this division of Mr. Brown's Six Poems; for he rejects the Sonnets numbered 153 and 154, as belonging "to nothing but themselves." They belong, indeed, to the same class of poems as constitute the bulk of those printed in 'The Passionate Pilgrim.' But, being printed in the collection of 1609, they offer very satisfactory evidence that "the begetter" of the Sonnets had no distinct principle of connection to work upon. He has printed, as already mentioned, two Sonnets which had previously appeared in 'The Passionate Pilgrim.' But, if they were taken out from the larger collection, no one could say that its continuity would be deranged. There are other Sonnets, properly so called, in 'The Passionate Pilgrim,' which, if they were to be *added* to the larger collection, there would be no difficulty in inserting them, so as to be as continuous as the two which are common to both works. We have no objection to proceed with our analytical classification without including the two Sonnets on "the little love-god;" because, if we were attempting here to present all Shakspeare's love-verses which exist in print, not being in the plays, we should have to insert six other poems which are in 'The Passionate Pilgrim.'

What, then, have we left of the Sonnets from the 127th to the 152nd which may warrant those twenty-six stanzas being regarded (with two exceptions pointed out by Mr. Brown himself) as a continuous poem, to be entitled, 'To his Mistress, on her Infidelity?' We have, indeed, a "leading idea," and a very distinct one, of some delusion, once cherished by the poet, against the power of which he struggles, and which his better reason finally rejects. But the complaint is not wholly that of the *infidelity* of a mistress; it is that the love which he bears towards her is incompatible with his sense of duty, and with that tranquillity of mind which belongs to a pure and lawful affection. This "leading idea" is expressed in *ten* stanzas, which we print in the order in which they occur. They are more or less strong and direct in their allusions: but, whether the situation which the poet describes be real or imaginary—whether he speak from the depth of his own feelings, or with his wonderful dramatic power—there are no verses in our language more expressive of the torments of a passion based upon unlawfulness. Throes such as these were somewhat uncommon amongst the gallants of the days of Elizabeth:—

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action; and till action, lust
Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame;
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;
Enjoy'd no sooner, but despised straight;
Past reason hunted; and no sooner had,
Past reason hated, as a swallow'd bait,
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;
A bliss in proof,—and proved, a very woe;
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream;

All this the world well knows; yet none
knows well

To shun the heaven that leads men to this
hell.—129

Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine
eyes,

That they behold, and see not what they see?
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
Yet, what the best is, take the worst to be.

If eyes, corrupt by over-partial looks,
 Be anchor'd in the bay where all men ride,
 Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks,
 Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied?
 Why should my heart think that a several
 plot,
 Which my heart knows the wide world's
 common place?
 Or mine eyes, seeing this, say this is not,
 To put fair truth upon so foul a face?
 In things right true my heart and eyes have
 err'd,
 And to this false plague are they now
 transferr'd.—137.

When my love swears that she is made of
 truth,
 I do believe her, though I know she lies;
 That she might think me some untutor'd
 youth,
 Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
 Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me
 young,
 Although she knows my days are past the
 best,
 Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue;
 On both sides thus is simple truth suppress'd.
 But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
 And wherefore say not I that I am old?
 O, love's best habit is in seeming trust,
 And age in love loves not to have years
 told:
 Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
 And in our faults by lies we flatter'd be.—
 138.

In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes,
 For they in thee a thousand errors note;
 But 't is my heart that loves what they de-
 spise,
 Who in despite of view is pleased to dote.
 Nor are mine ears with thy tongue's tune
 delighted;
 Nor tender feeling to base touches prone,
 Nor taste nor smell, desire to be invited
 To any sensual feast with thee alone:
 But my five wits, nor my five senses can
 Dissuade one foolish heart from serving thee,
 Who leaves unsway'd the likeness of a man,
 Thy proud heart's slave and vassal wretch
 to be:
 Only my plague thus far I count my gain,
 That she that makes me sin awards me
 pain.—141.

Love is my sin, and thy dear virtue hate,
 Hate of my sin, grounded on sinful loving:
 O, but with mine compare thou thine own
 state,
 And thou shalt find it merits not reproving;
 Or if it do, not from those lips of thine,
 That have profaned their scarlet ornaments,
 And seal'd false bonds of love as oft as mine;
 Robb'd others' beds' revenues of their rents.
 Be it lawful I love thee, as thou lov'st those
 Whom thine eyes woo as mine importune
 thee:

Root pity in thy heart, that, when it grows,
 Thy pity may deserve to pitied be.

If thou dost seek to have what thou dost
 hide,

By self-example mayst thou be denied!—142.

My love is as a fever, longing still
 For that which longer nurseth the disease;
 Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
 The uncertain sickly appetite to please.
 My reason, the physician to my love,
 Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,
 Hath left me, and I desperate now approve,
 Desire is death, which physic did except.
 Past cure I am, now reason is past care,
 And frantic mad with evermore unrest;
 My thoughts and my discourse as mad men's
 are,
 At random from the truth vainly express'd;
 For I have sworn thee fair, and thought
 thee bright,
 Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.
 —147.

O me! what eyes hath love put in my head,
 Which have no correspondence with true sight?
 Or, if they have, where is my judgment fled,
 That censures falsely what they see aright?
 If that be fair whereon my false eyes dote,
 What means the world to say it is not so?
 If it be not, then love doth well denote
 Love's eye is not so true as all men's: no,
 How can it? O how can Love's eye be true,
 That is so vex'd with watching and with tears?
 No marvel then though I mistake my view;
 The sun itself sees not till heaven clears.

O cunning Love! with tears thou keep'st
 me blind,

Lest eyes well-seeing thy foul faults should
 find.—148.

O, from what power hast thou this powerful
 might,
 With insufficiency my heart to sway?

To make me give the lie to my true sight,
And swear that brightness doth not grace the
day?

Whence hast thou this becoming of things ill,
That in the very refuse of thy deeds
There is such strength and warrantise of skill,
That in my mind thy worst all best exceeds?
Who taught thee how to make me love thee
more,

The more I hear and see just cause of hate?
O, though I love what others do abhor,
With others thou shouldst not abhor my state;
If thy unworthiness raised love in me,
More worthy I to be beloved of thee.—150.

Love is too young to know what conscience is;
Yet who knows not conscience is born of love?
Then, gentle cheater, urge not my amiss,
Lest guilty of my faults thy sweet self prove.
For thou betraying me, I do betray
My nobler part to my gross body's treason;
My soul doth tell my body that he may
Triumph in love; flesh stays no farther reason,
But, rising at thy name, doth point out thee
As his triumphant prize. Proud of this pride,
He is contented thy poor drudge to be,
To stand in thy affairs, fall by thy side.

No want of conscience hold it that I call
Her—love, for whose dear love I rise and
fall.—151.

In loving thee thou know'st I am forsworn,
But thou art twice forsworn, to me love
swearing;

In act thy bed-vow broke, and new faith torn,
In vowing new hate after new love bearing.
But why of two oaths' breach do I accuse thee,
When I break twenty? I am perjured most;
For all my vows are oaths but to misuse thee,
And all my honest faith in thee is lost:

For I have sworn deep oaths of thy deep kind-
ness,

Oaths of thy love, thy truth, thy constancy;
And, to enlighten thee, gave eyes to blindness,
Or made them swear against the thing they
see;

For I have sworn thee fair: more perjured I,
To swear, against the truth, so foul a
lie!—152.

We have only three Sonnets left, out of the
twenty-six stanzas, in which we may find any
allusion to the "infidelity" of the poet's
"mistress." They are these:

Beshrew that heart that makes my heart to
groan

For that deep wound it gives my friend and
me!

Is't not enough to torture me alone,
But slave to slavery my sweet'st friend must
be?

Me from myself thy cruel eye hath taken,
And my next self thou harder hast engross'd;
Of him, myself, and thee, I am forsaken;
A torment thrice three-fold thus to be cross'd.
Prison my heart in thy steel bosom's ward,
But then my friend's heart let my poor heart
bail;

Who e'er keeps me, let my heart be his guard;
Thou canst not then use rigour in my jail:

And yet thou wilt; for I, being pent in thee,
Perforce am thine, and all that is in me.—

133.

So now I have confess'd that he is thine,
And I myself am mortgaged to thy will;
Myself I'll forfeit, so that other mine
Thou wilt restore, to be my comfort still:
But thou wilt not, nor he will not be free,
For thou art covetous, and he is kind;
He learn'd but, surety-like, to write for me,
Under that bond that him as fast doth bind.
The statute of thy beauty thou wilt take,
Thou usurer, that putt'st forth all to use,
And sue a friend, came debtor for my sake;
So him I lose through my unkind abuse.

Him have I lost; thou hast both him and me;
He pays the whole, and yet am I not free.—

134.

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still;
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman, colour'd ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
Tempteth my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turn'd fiend,
Suspect I may, but not directly tell;
But being both from me, both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another's hell.

Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in
doubt,

Till my bad angel fire my good one out.—

144.

The 144th, we must again point out, was
printed in 'The Passionate Pilgrim' in 1599.
This Sonnet, then, referring, as it appears to

do, to private circumstances of considerable delicacy, was public enough to fall into the hands of a piratical bookseller, ten years before the larger collection in which it a second time appears was printed. But in that larger collection the poet accuses the friend as well as the mistress. We have no means of knowing whether the six Sonnets, in which this accusation appears, existed in 1599, or what was the extent of their publicity; but by their publication in 1609 we are enabled to compare "the better angel" with "the worser spirit:"—

Full many a glorious morning have I seen
Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye,
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchymy;
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride
With ugly rack on his celestial face,
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:
Even so my sun one early morn did shine,
With all triumphant splendour on my brow;
But out! alack! he was but one hour mine,
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me
now.

Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;
Suns of the world may stain, when heaven's
sun staineth.—33.

Why didst thou promise such a beauteous day,
And make me travel forth without my cloak,
To let base clouds o'ertake me in my way,
Hiding thy bravery in their rotten smoke?

'T is not enough that through the cloud thou
break,

To dry the rain on my storm-beaten face,
For no man well of such a salve can speak,
That heals the wound, and cures not the dis-
grace:

Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief;
Though thou repent, yet I have still the loss:
The offender's sorrow lends but weak relief
To him that bears the strong offence's cross.

Ah! but those tears are pearl which thy love
sheds,

And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds.
—34.

No more be grieved at that which thou hast
done:

Roses have thorns, and silver fountains mud;
Clouds and eclipses stain both moon and sun,
And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud.

All men make faults, and even I in this,
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are:
For to thy sensual fault I bring in sense,
(Thy adverse party is thy advocate,)
And 'gainst myself a lawful plea commence:
Such civil war is in my love and hate,
That I an accessory needs must be
To that sweet thief which sourly robs from
me.—35.

Take all my loves, my love, yea, take them all;
What hast thou then more than thou hadst
before?

No love, my love, that thou mayst true love
call;

All mine was thine before thou hadst this
more.

Then if for my love thou my love receivest,
I cannot blame thee, for my love thou usest;
But yet be blamed, if thou thyself deceivest
By wilful taste of what thyself refusest.

I do forgive thy robbery, gentle thief,
Although thou steal thee all my poverty;
And yet, love knows, it is a greater grief
To bear love's wrong than hate's known injury.

Lascivious grace, in whom all ill well shows,
Kill me with spites; yet we must not be
foes.—40.

Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits,
When I am sometime absent from thy heart,
Thy beauty and thy years full well befits,
For still temptation follows where thou art.

Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won;
Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assail'd;
And, when a woman woos, what woman's son
Will sourly leave her till she have prevail'd?

Ah me! but yet thou mightst my seat forbear,
And chide thy beauty and thy straying youth,
Who lead thee in their riot even there

Where thou art forced to break a twofold
truth;

Hers, by thy beauty tempting her to thee,
Thine, by thy beauty being false to me.—41.

That thou hast her, it is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said I loved her dearly;
That she hath thee, is of my wailing chief,
A loss in love that touches me more nearly.
Loving offenders, thus I will excuse ye:—
Thou dost love her, because thou knew'st I
love her;

And for my sake even so doth she abuse me,
Suffering my friend for my sake to approve
her.

If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,
And losing her, my friend hath found that
loss;

Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
And both for my sake lay on me this cross:

But here's the joy; my friend and I are
one;

Sweet flattery! then she loves but me
alone.—42.

It is probably to the same friend that the
following mild reflections upon the general
faults of his character are addressed:—

They that have power to hurt and will do none,
That do not do the thing they most do show,
Who, moving others, are themselves as stone,
Unmoved, cold and to temptation slow;
They rightly do inherit heaven's graces,
And husband nature's riches from expense;
They are the lords and owners of their faces,
Others but stewards of their excellence.

The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die;
But, if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:

For sweetest things turn sourest by their
deeds;

Lilies that fester smell far worse than
weeds.—94.

How sweet and lovely dost thou make the
shame,

Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy budding name!
O, in what sweets dost thou thy sins enclose!
That tongue that tells the story of thy days,
Making lascivious comments on thy sport,
Cannot dispraise but in a kind of praise;
Naming thy name blesses an ill report.

O what a mansion have those vices got,
Which for their habitation chose out thee!
Where beauty's veil doth cover every blot,
And all things turn to fair that eyes can see!

Take heed, dear heart, of this large privi-
lege;

The hardest knife ill-used doth lose his
edge.—95.

Some say, thy fault is youth, some wanton-
ness;

Some say, thy grace is youth and gentle
sport;

Both grace and faults are loved of more and
less:

Thou mak'st faults graces that to thee resort.
As on the finger of a throned queen

The basest jewel will be well esteem'd;

So are those errors that in thee are seen

To truths translated, and for true things
deem'd.

How many lambs might the stern wolf betray,
If like a lamb he could his looks translate!

How many gazers mightst thou lead away,

If thou wouldst use the strength of all thy
state!

But do not so; I love thee in such sort,

As, thou being mine, mine is thy good
report.—96.

But the poet, true to his general principle of
morals, holds that forgiveness should follow
upon repented transgressions:—

Like as, to make our appetites more keen,
With eager compounds we our palate urge:

As, to prevent our maladies unseen,

We sicken to shun sickness, when we purge;

Even so, being full of your ne'er-cloying sweet-
ness,

To bitter sauces did I frame my feeding,

And, sick of welfare, found a kind of meet-
ness

To be diseased ere that there was true needing.

Thus policy in love, to anticipate

The ills that were not, grew to faults assured,

And brought to medicine a healthful state,

Which, rank of goodness, would by ill be
cured.

But thence I learn, and find the lesson true,

Drugs poison him that so fell sick of you.

—118.

What potions have I drunk of Siren tears,

Distill'd from limbecs foul as hell within,

Applying fears to hopes, and hopes to fears,

Still losing when I saw myself to win!

What wretched errors hath my heart com-
mitted,

Whilst it hath thought itself so blessed never!

How have mine eyes out of their spheres been
fitted,

In the distraction of this madding fever!

O benefit of ill! now I find true

That better is by evil still made better;

And ruin'd love, when it is built anew,

Grows fairer than at first, more strong, far
greater.

So I return rebuked to my content,
And gain by ill thrice more than I have
spent.—119.

That you were once unkind, befriends me now,
And for that sorrow, which I then did feel,
Needs must I under my transgression bow,
Unless my nerves were brass or hammer'd
steel.

For if you were by my unkindness shaken,
As I by yours, you have pass'd a hell of time:
And I, a tyrant, have no leisure taken
To weigh how once I suffer'd in your crime.
O that our night of woe might have re-
member'd

My deepest sense, how hard true sorrow hits,
And soon to you, as you to me, then tender'd
The humble salve which wounded bosoms fits!
But that your trespass now becomes a fee;
Mine ransoms yours, and yours must ransom
me.—120.

II.

We have thus selected all the Sonnets, or stanzas, that appear to have reference to the subject of love,—whether those which express the light playfulness of affection, the abiding confidence, the distracting doubts, the reproaches for pride or neglect, the fierce jealousies, the complaints that another is preferred. Much of this may be real, much merely dramatic. But it appears to us that it would have been quite impossible to have maintained that these fragments relate to a particular incident of the poet's life—the indulgence of an illicit love, with which the equally illicit attachment of a youthful friend interfered—unless there had been a forced association of the whole series of Sonnets with that youthful friend to whom the first seventeen Sonnets are clearly addressed. Mr. Brown groups the Sonnets from the 27th to the 55th as the "Second Poem," which he entitles, 'To his Friend—who had robbed him of his mistress, forgiving him.' Now, literally, the Sonnets we have already given, the 33rd, 34th, 35th, 40th, 41st, and 42nd, are all that within these limits can be held to have reference to such a subject. The 27th and 28th Sonnets have not the

slightest allusion to this supposed injury; and we shall presently endeavour to show that they have been wrested from their proper place. The 29th, 30th, 31st, and 32nd are Sonnets of the most confiding friendship, full of the simplest, and therefore the deepest pathos, and which we have no hesitation in classing amongst those which are strictly personal—those to which the lines of Wordsworth apply:—

"Scorn not the Sonnet: Critic, you have
frown'd

Mindless of its just honours. With this key
Shakspeare unlock'd his heart."

The following exquisite lines are familiar to most poetical students:—

When in disgrace with fortune and men's
eyes,

I all alone beweepe my outcast state,

And trouble deaf Heaven with my bootless
cries,

And look upon myself, and curse my fate,

Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,

Featured like him, like him with friends
possess'd,

Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,

Haply I think on thee,—and then my state

(Like to the lark at break of day arising

From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven's
gate;

For thy sweet love remember'd, such
wealth brings,

That then I scorn to change my state with
kings.—29.

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought

I summon up remembrance of things past,

I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,

And with old woes new wail my dear times'
waste:

Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,

For precious friends hid in death's dateless
night,

And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd
woe,

And moan the expense of many a vanish'd
sight.

Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,

And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er

The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,

Which I new pay as if not paid before.

But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,

All losses are restored, and sorrows end.—30.

Thy bosom is endeared with all hearts,
Which I by lacking have supposed dead;
And there reigns love and all love's loving parts,

And all those friends which I thought buried.
How many a holy and obsequious tear
Hath dear religious love stolen from mine eye,
As interest of the dead, which now appear
But things removed, that hidden in thee lie?
Thou art the grave where buried love doth live,

Hung with the trophies of my lovers gone,
Who all their parts of me to thee did give;
That due of many now is thine alone:

Their images I loved I view in thee,
And thou (all they) hast all the all of me.—31.

If thou survive my well-contented day,
When that churl Death my bones with dust shall cover,

And shalt by fortune once more re-survey
These poor rude lines of thy deceased lover,
Compare them with the bettering of the time;
And, though they be outstripp'd by every pen,
Reserve them for my love, not for their rhyme,
Exceeded by the height of happier men.

O then vouchsafe me but this loving thought!
Had my friend's muse grown with this growing age,

A dearer birth than this his love had brought,
To march in ranks of better equipage:

But since he died, and poets better prove,
Theirs for their style I'll read, his for his love.—32.

Immediately succeeding these are the three stanzas we have already quoted, in which the poet is held to accuse his friend of having robbed him of his mistress. In these stanzas the friend is spoken of in connexion with a "sensual fault," a "trespass," &c. But, in those which follow, the "bewailed guilt" belongs to the poet—the "worth and truth" to his friend. Surely these are not continuous. In the 36th, 37th, 38th, and 39th Sonnets, we have the expression of that deep humility which may be traced through many of these remarkable compositions, and of which we find the first sound in the 29th Sonnet:—

Let me confess that we two must be twain,
Although our undivided loves are one:
So shall those blots that do with me remain,
Without thy help, by me be borne alone.
In our two loves there is but one respect,
Though in our lives a separable spite,
Which, though it alter not love's sole effect,
Yet doth it steal sweet hours from love's delight.

I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
Lest my bewailed guilt should do thee shame;
Nor thou with public kindness honour me,
Unless thou take that honour from thy name:
But do not so; I love thee in such sort,
As, thou being mine, mine is thy good report.—36.

As a decrepit father takes delight
To see his active child do deeds of youth,
So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth;
For whether beauty, birth, or wealth, or wit,
Or any of these all, or all, or more,
Entitled in thy parts, do crowned sit,
I make my love engrafted to this store:
So then I am not lame, poor, nor despised,
Whilst that this shadow doth such substance give,

That I in thy abundance am sufficed,
And by a part of all thy glory live.
Look what is best, that best I wish in thee;
This wish I have; then ten times happy me!—37.

How can my muse want subject to invent,
While thou dost breathe, that pour'st into my verse

Thine own sweet argument, too excellent
For every vulgar paper to rehearse?
O, give thyself the thanks, if aught in me
Worthy perusal stand against thy sight;
For who's so dumb that cannot write to thee,
When thou thyself dost give invention light?
Be thou the tenth muse, ten times more in worth

Than those old nine which rhymers invoke;
And he that calls on thee, let him bring forth
Eternal numbers to outlive long date.

If my slight muse do please these curious days,

The pain be mine, but thine shall be the praise.—38.

O, how thy worth with manners may I sing,
When thou art all the better part of me?

What can mine own praise to mine own self
bring?

And what is't but mine own, when I praise
thee?

Even for this let us divided live,
And our dear love lose name of single one,
That by this separation I may give
That due to thee which thou deservest alone.
O, absence, what a torment wouldst thou
prove,

Were it not thy sour leisure gave sweet leave
To entertain the time with thoughts of love,
(Which time and thoughts so sweetly doth
deceive,)

And that thou teachest how to make one
twain,

By praising him here, who doth hence
remain!—39.

The 40th, 41st, and 42nd Sonnets return to the complaint of his friend's faithlessness. Surely, then, the Sonnets we have just quoted must be interpolated. The 43rd is entirely isolated from what precedes and what follows. But in the 39th we have allusions to "separation" and "absence;" and in the 44th we return to the subject of "injurious distance." With some alterations of arrangement we can group nine Sonnets together, which form a connected epistle to an absent friend, and which convey those sentiments of real affection which can only be adequately transmitted in language and imagery possessing, as these portions do, the charm of nature and simplicity. The tone of truth and reality is remarkably contrasted with those artificial passages which have imparted their character to the whole series in the estimation of many:—

How heavy do I journey on the way,
When what I seek,—my weary travel's end,—
Doth teach that ease and that repose to say,
"Thus far the miles are measured from thy
friend!"

The beast that bears me, tired with my woe,
Plods dully on, to bear that weight in me,
As if by some instinct the wretch did know
His rider loved not speed, being made from
thee:

The bloody spur cannot provoke him on
That sometimes anger thrusts into his hide,
Which heavily he answers with a groan,
More sharp to me than spurring to his side;

For that same groan doth put this in my
mind,

My grief lies onward, and my joy behind.
—50.

Thus can my love excuse the slow offence
Of my dull bearer, when from thee I speed:
From where thou art why should I haste me
thence?

Till I return, of posting is no need.

O, what excuse will my poor beast then find,
When swift extremity can seem but slow?

Then should I spur, though mounted on the
wind;

In winged speed no motion shall I know:

Then can no horse with my desire keep pace;
Therefore desire, of perfect love being made,
Shall neigh (no dull flesh) in his fiery race;

But love, for love, thus shall excuse my jade;
Since from thee going he went wilful slow,
Towards thee I'll run, and give him leave
to go.—51.

So am I as the rich, whose blessed key
Can bring him to his sweet up-locked trea-
sure,

The which he will not every hour survey,
For blunting the fine point of seldom plea-
sure.

Therefore are feasts so solemn and so rare,
Since seldom coming, in the long year set,
Like stones of worth they thinly placed are,
Or captain jewels in the carcanet.

So is the time that keeps you as my chest,
Or as the wardrobe which the robe doth
hide,

To make some special instant special-bless'd,
By new unfolding his imprison'd pride.

Blessed are you, whose worthiness gives
scope,

Being had, to triumph, being lack'd, to
hope.—52.

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
But then begins a journey in my head,
To work my mind, when body's work's ex-
pired:

For then my thoughts (from far where I abide)
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see:
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,

Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous, and her old face
new.

Lo, thus, by day my limbs, by night my
mind,

For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.—

27.

How can I then return in happy plight,
That am debarr'd the benefit of rest?

When day's oppression is not eased by night,
But day by night and night by day oppress'd?

And each, though enemies to either's reign,
Do in consent shake hands to torture me,

The one by toil, the other to complain

How far I toil, still farther off from thee.

I tell the day, to please him, thou art bright,
And dost him grace when clouds do blot the

heaven:

So flatter I the swart-complexion'd night;

When sparkling stars twine not, thou gild'st
the even.

But day doth daily draw my sorrows longer,

And night doth nightly make grief's length
seem stronger.—28.

Is it thy will thy image should keep open
My heavy eyelids to the weary night?

Dost thou desire my slumbers should be
broken,

While shadows, like to thee, do mock my
sight?

Is it thy spirit that thou send'st from thee

So far from home, into my deeds to pry;

To find out shames and idle hours in me,

The scope and tenor of thy jealousy?

O no! thy love, though much, is not so great;

It is my love that keeps mine eye awake;

Mine own true love that doth my rest defeat,

To play the watchman ever for thy sake:

For thee watch I, whilst thou dost wake
elsewhere

From me far off, with others all too near.—

61.

When most I wink, then do mine eyes best
see,

For all the day they view things unrespected:

But when I sleep, in dreams they look on
thee,

And, darkly bright, are bright in dark di-
rected;

Then thou whose shadow shadows doth make
bright,

How would thy shadow's form form happy
show

To the clear day with thy much clearer light,
When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so?

How would (I say) mine eyes be blessed made
By looking on thee in the living day,

When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade
Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth

stay?

All days are nights to see, till I see thee,

And nights, bright days, when dreams do
show thee me.—43.

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
Injurious distance should not stop my way;

For then, despite of space, I would be brought
From limits far remote, where thou dost stay.

No matter then, although my foot did stand

Upon the farthest earth removed from thee,

For nimble thought can jump both sea and
land,

As soon as think the place where he would
be.

But ah! thought kills me, that I am not
thought,

To leap large lengths of miles when thou art
gone,

But that, so much of earth and water wrought,
I must attend time's leisure with my moan;

Receiving nought by elements so slow

But heavy tears, badges of either's woe:—

44.

The other two, slight air and purging fire,

Are both with thee, wherever I abide;

The first my thought, the other my desire,

These present-absent with swift motion slide.

For when these quicker elements are gone

In tender embassy of love to thee,

My life, being made of four, with two alone,

Sinks down to death, oppress'd with melan-
choly;

Until life's composition be recured

By those swift messengers return'd from thee,

Who even but now come back again, assured

Of thy fair health, recounting it to me:

This told, I joy; but then no longer glad,

I send them back again, and straight grow
sad.—45.

The transpositions we have made in the arrangement are justified by the consideration that in the original text the 50th, 51st, and 52nd Sonnets are entirely isolated; that the 27th and 28th are also perfectly unconnected with what precedes and what follows; that the 61st stands equally alone; and that

the 43rd, 44th, and 45th are in a similar position. We have now a perfect little poem describing the journey—the restless pilgrimage of thought—the desire for return.

The thoughts of a temporary separation lead to the fear that absence may produce estrangement:—

How careful was I, when I took my way,
Each trifle under truest bars to thrust,
That, to my use, it might unused stay
From hands of falsehood, in sure wards of trust!

But thou, to whom my jewels trifles are,
Most worthy comfort, now my greatest grief,
Thou, best of dearest, and mine only care,
Art left the prey of every vulgar thief.
Thee have I not lock'd up in any chest,
Save where thou art not, though I feel thou art,

Within the gentle closure of my breast,
From whence at pleasure thou mayst come
and part;

And even thence thou wilt be stolen I fear,
For truth proves thievish for a prize so dear.

—48.

The sentiment is somewhat differently repeated in a Sonnet which is entirely isolated in the place where it stands in the original:—

So are you to my thoughts, as food to life,
Or as sweet-season'd showers are to the ground;
And for the peace of you I hold such strife
As 'twixt a miser and his wealth is found:
Now proud as an enjoyer, and anon
Doubting the filching age will steal his treasure;

Now counting best to be with you alone,
Then better'd that the world may see my pleasure:

Sometime, all full with feasting on your sight,
And by and by clean starved for a look;
Possessing or pursuing no delight,
Save what is had or must from you be took
Thus do I pine and surfeit day by day,
Or gluttoning on all, or all away.—75.

But the 49th Sonnet carries forward the dread expressed in the 48th that his friend will “be stolen,” into the apprehension that coldness, and neglect, and desertion may one day ensue:—

Against that time, if ever that time come,
When I shall see thee frown on my defects,

When as thy love hath cast his utmost sum,
Call'd to that audit by advised respects;
Against that time when thou shalt strangely
pass,

And scarcely greet me with that sun, thine eye,

When love, converted from the thing it was,
Shall reasons find of settled gravity;

Against that time do I ensconce me here
Within the knowledge of mine own desert,
And this my hand against myself uprear,
To guard the lawful reasons on thy part:

To leave poor me thou hast the strength
of laws,

Since, why to love, I can allege no cause.

—49.

This Sonnet is also completely isolated; but much further on, according to the original arrangement, we find the idea here conveyed of that self-sacrificing humility which will endure unkindness without complaint, worked out with exquisite tenderness:—

When thou shalt be disposed to set me light,
And place my merit in the eye of Scorn,
Upon thy side against myself I'll fight,
And prove thee virtuous, though thou art
forsworn.

With mine own weakness being best acquainted,

Upon thy part I can set down a story
Of faults conceal'd, wherein I am attainted;
That thou, in losing me, shalt win much glory:
And I by this will be a gainer too;
For bending all my loving thoughts on thee,
The injuries that to myself I do,
Doing thee vantage, double-vantage me.

Such is my love, to thee I so belong,

That for thy right myself will bear all
wrong.—88.

Say that thou didst forsake me for some fault,
And I will comment upon that offence:
Speak of my lameness, and I straight will
halt;

Against thy reasons making no defence.

Thou canst not, love, disgrace me half so ill,
To set a form upon desired change,

As I'll myself disgrace: knowing thy will,

I will acquaintance strangle, and look strange;

Be absent from thy walks; and in my tongue

Thy sweet-beloved name no more shall dwell;

Lest I (too much profane) should do it wrong,
And haply of our old acquaintance tell.

For thee, against myself I'll vow debate,
For I must ne'er love him whom thou dost
hate.—89.

Then hate me when thou wilt; if ever, now;
Now, while the world is bent my deeds to
cross,

Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow,
And do not drop in for an after loss:

Ah! do not, when my heart hath scaped this
sorrow,

Come in the rearward of a conquer'd woe;

Give not a windy night a rainy morrow,

To linger out a purposed overthrow.

If thou wilt leave me, do not leave me last,

When other petty griefs have done their spite.

But in the onset come; so shall I taste

At first the very worst of fortune's might;

And other strains of woe, which now seem
woe,

Compared with loss of thee will not seem
so.—90.

Some glory in their birth, some in their skill,

Some in their wealth, some in their body's
force;

Some in their garments, though new-fangled
ill;

Some in their hawks and hounds, some in
their horse;

And every humour hath his adjunct pleasure,
Wherein it finds a joy above the rest;

But these particulars are not my measure,

All these I better in one general best.

Thy love is better than high birth to me,

Richer than wealth, prouder than garments'
cost,

Of more delight than hawks or horses be;

And having thee, of all men's pride I boast.

Wretched in this alone, that thou mayst
take

All this away, and me most wretched
make.—91.

But do thy worst to steal thyself away,

For term of life thou art assured mine;

And life no longer than thy love will stay,

For it depends upon that love of thine.

Then need I not to fear the worst of wrongs,

When in the least of them my life hath end.

I see a better state to me belongs

Than that which on thy humour doth depend.

Thou canst not vex me with inconstant mind,
Since that my life on thy revolt doth lie.

O what a happy title do I find,

Happy to have thy love, happy to die!

But what's so blessed-fair that fears no
blot?—

Thou mayst be false, and yet I know it
not.—92.

So shall I live, supposing thou art true,

Like a deceived husband; so love's face

May still seem love to me, though alter'd-new;

Thy looks with me, thy heart in other place:

For there can live no hatred in thine eye,

Therefore in that I cannot know thy change.

In many's looks the false heart's history

Is writ, in moods and frowns and wrinkles
strange;

But Heaven in thy creation did decree

That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell;

Whate'er thy thoughts or thy heart's work-
ings be,

Thy looks should nothing thence but sweet-
ness tell.

How like Eve's apple doth thy beauty grow,
If thy sweet virtue answer not thy show!

—93.

Separated from the preceding stanzas by three Sonnets, the 94th, 95th, and 96th, which we have already given—(they are those in which a friend is mildly upbraided for the defects in his character)—we have a second little poem on Absence. It would be difficult to find anything more perfect in our own or any other language:—

How like a winter hath my absence been

From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!

What freezings have I felt, what dark days
seen!

What old December's bareness everywhere!

And yet this time removed was summer's
time;

The teeming autumn, big with rich increase,

Bearing the wanton burden of the prime,

Like widow'd wombs after their lord's
decease:

Yet this abundant issue seem'd to me

But hope of orphans, and unfather'd fruit;

For summer and his pleasures wait on thee,

And, thou away, the very birds are mute;

Or, if they sing, 't is with so dull a cheer,

That leaves look pale, dreading the winter's
near.—97.

From you have I been absent in the spring,
When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,
Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,
That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with
him.

Yet not the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell
Of different flowers in odour and in hue,
Could make me any summer's story tell,
Or from their proud lap pluck them where
they grew:

Nor did I wonder at the lilies white,
Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose;
They were but sweet, but figures of delight,
Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.

Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,
As with your shadow I with these did
play.—98.

The forward violet thus did I chide:—
Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet
that smells,

If not from my love's breath? The purple
pride

Which on thy soft cheek for complexion
dwells,

In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed.

The lily I condemned for thy hand,

And buds of marjoram had stolen thy hair:

The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,

One blushing shame, another white despair;

A third, nor red nor white, had stolen of both,

And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath;

But for his theft, in pride of all his growth

A vengeful canker eat him up to death.

More flowers I noted, yet I none could see,

But sweet or colour it had stolen from
thee.—99.

But this poem is quite unconnected with what precedes it. It is placed where it is, upon no principle of continuity. Are we, then, to infer that the friend whose "shame" is "like a canker in the budding rose" is the person who is immediately afterwards addressed as one from whom every flower hath stolen "sweet or colour?" If we read these three stanzas without any impression of their connexion with something that has gone before, we shall irresistibly feel that they are addressed to a female. They point at repeated absences; and why may they not then be addressed to the poet's first love? The Earl of Southampton, or the Earl of Pembroke, to whom the series of Sonnets are

held all to refer, except when they specially address a dark-haired lady of questionable character, would not have been greatly pleased to have been complimented on the sweetness of his breath, or the whiteness of his hand. The Sonnets which are unquestionably addressed to a male, although they employ the term "beauty" in a way which we cannot easily comprehend in our own days, have always reference to *manly* beauty. The comparisons in the above Sonnets as clearly relate to *female* beauty. They are precisely the same as Spenser uses in one of his Amoretti,—the 64th; which thus concludes:—

"Such fragrant flowers do give most odorous
smell,

But her sweet odour did them all excel."

It appears to us that in both the poems on Absence, in the stanzas which anticipate neglect and coldness, and in others which we have given and are about to give, we must not be too ready to connect their images with the person who is addressed in the first seventeen Sonnets; or be always prepared to "seize a clue which *innumerable* passages give us," according to Mr. Hallam, "and suppose that they allude to a youth of high rank as well as personal beauty and accomplishment."* The chief characteristic of those passages which clearly apply to that "unknown youth" is, as it appears to us, extravagance of admiration conveyed in very hyperbolical language. Much that we have quoted offers no example of the justness of Mr. Hallam's complaint against these productions:—"There is a weakness and folly in all excessive and misplaced affection, which is not redeemed by the touches of nobler sentiments that abound in this long series of Sonnets." It would be difficult, we think, to find more forcible thoughts expressed in more simple, and therefore touching language, than in the following continuous verses. They comprise all the Sonnets numbered from 109 to 125, with the exception of 118, 119, 120, 121, three of which we have already printed as belonging to another subject than the poet's constancy of affection;

* 'Literature of Europe,' vol. iii. p. 503.

and one of which we shall give as an isolated fragment :—

O, never say that I was false of heart,
Though absence seem'd my flame to qualify !
As easy might I from myself depart,
As from my soul which in thy breast doth lie:
That is my home of love: if I have ranged,
Like him that travels, I return again;
Just to the time, not with the time ex-
changed,—

So that myself bring water for my stain.
Never believe, though in my nature reign'd
All frailties that besiege all kinds of blood,
That it could so preposterously be stain'd,
To leave for nothing all thy sum of good;
For nothing this wide universe I call,
Save thou, my rose; in it thou art my
all.—109.

Alas, 't is true, I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is
most dear,
Made old offences of affections new.
Most true it is that I have look'd on truth
Askance and strangely; but, by all above,
These blenches gave my heart another youth,
And worse essays proved thee my best of love.
Now all is done, save what shall have no end:
Mine appetite I never more will grind
On newer proof, to try an older friend,
A God in love, to whom I am confined.
Then give me welcome, next my heaven the
best,
Even to thy pure and most most loving
breast.—110.

O, for my sake do you with fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide,
Than public means, which public manners
breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a
brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:
Pity me then, and wish I were renew'd;
Whilst, like a willing patient, I will drink
Potions of eysell, 'gainst my strong infection;
No bitterness that I will bitter think,
Nor double penance, to correct correction.
Pity me then, dear friend, and I assure ye,
Even that your pity is enough to cure me.
—111.

Your love and pity doth the impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamp'd upon my brow;
For what care I who calls me well or ill,
So you o'er-green my bad, my good allow?
You are my all-the-world, and I must strive
To know my shames and praises from your
tongue;
None else to me, nor I to none alive,
That my steel'd sense or changes, right or
wrong.

In so profound abysm I throw all care
Of other's voices, that my adder's sense
To critic and to flatterer stopped are.
Mark how with my neglect I do dispense:—
You are so strongly in my purpose bred,
That all the world besides methinks are
dead.—112.

Since I left you, mine eye is in my mind;
And that which governs me to go about
Doth part his function, and is partly blind,
Seems seeing, but effectually is out;
For it no form delivers to the heart
Of bird, of flower, or shape, which it doth
latch;
Of his quick objects hath the mind no part,
Nor his own vision holds what it doth catch;
For if it see the rud'st or gentlest sight,
The most sweet favour, or deformed'st crea-
ture,
The mountain or the sea, the day or night,
The crow, or dove, it shapes them to your
feature.
Incapable of more, replete with you,
My most true mind thus maketh mine
untrue.—113.

Or whether doth my mind, being crown'd
with you,
Drink up the monarch's plague, this flattery,
Or whether shall I say mine eye saith true,
And that your love taught it this alchymy,
To make of monsters and things indigest
Such cherubims as your sweet self resemble,
Creating every bad a perfect best,
As fast as objects to his beams assemble?
O, 't is the first; 't is flattery in my seeing,
And my great mind most kingly drinks it up:
Mine eye well knows what with his gust is
'greeing,
And to his palate doth prepare the cup:
If it be poison'd, 'tis the lesser sin
That mine eye loves it, and doth first
begin.—114.

Those lines that I before have writ, do lie,
 Even those that said I could not love you
 dearer;
 Yet then my judgment knew no reason why
 My most full flame should afterwards burn
 clearer.
 But reckoning time, whose million'd accidents
 Creep in 'twixt vows, and change decrees of
 kings,
 Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp'st intents,
 Divert strong minds to the course of altering
 things;
 Alas! why, fearing of time's tyranny,
 Might I not then say, "Now I love you best,"
 When I was certain o'er incertainty,
 Crowning the present, doubting of the rest?
 Love is a babe; then might I not say so,
 To give full growth to that which still doth
 grow?—115.

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
 Admit impediments. Love is not love
 Which alters when it alteration finds,
 Or bends with the remover to remove:
 O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,
 That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
 It is the star to every wandering bark,
 Whose worth's unknown, although his height
 be taken.
 Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and
 cheeks
 Within his bending sickle's compass come;
 Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
 But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
 If this be error, and upon me proved,
 I never writ, nor no man ever loved.—116.

Accuse me thus; that I have scanted all
 Wherein I should your great deserts repay;
 Forget upon your dearest love to call,
 Whereto all bonds do tie me day by day;
 That I have frequent been with unknown
 minds,
 And given to time your own dear-purchased
 right;
 That I have hoisted sail to all the winds
 Which should transport me farthest from your
 sight.
 Book both my wilfulness and errors down,
 And, on just proof, surmise accumulate,
 Bring me within the level of your frown,
 But shoot not at me in your waken'd hate:
 Since my appeal says, I did strive to prove
 The constancy and virtue of your love.—117.

Thy gift, thy tables, are within my brain
 Full character'd with lasting memory,
 Which shall above that idle rank remain,
 Beyond all date, even to eternity:
 Or at the least so long as brain and heart
 Have faculty by nature to subsist;
 Till each to raz'd oblivion yield his part
 Of thee, thy record never can be miss'd.
 That poor retention could not so much hold,
 Nor need I tallies, thy dear love to score;
 Therefore to give them from me was I bold,
 To trust those tables that receive thee more;
 To keep an adjunct to remember thee,
 Were to import forgetfulness in me.—122.

No! Time, thou shalt not boast that I do
 change:

Thy pyramids built up with newer might
 To me are nothing novel, nothing strange;
 They are but dressings of a former sight.
 Our dates are brief, and therefore we admire
 What thou dost foist upon us that is old;
 And rather make them born to our desire,
 Than think that we before have heard them
 told.

Thy registers and thee I both defy,
 Not wondering at the present nor the past;
 For thy records and what we see do lie,
 Made more or less by thy continual haste:
 This I do vow, and this shall ever be,
 I will be true, despite thy scythe and
 thee:—123.

If my dear love were but the child of state,
 It might for fortune's bastard be unfather'd,
 As subject to time's love, or to time's hate,
 Weeds among weeds, or flowers with flowers
 gather'd.

No, it was builded far from accident;
 It suffers not in smiling pomp, nor falls
 Under the blow of thrall'd discontent,
 Whereto the inviting time our fashion calls:
 It fears not policy, that heretic,
 Which works on leases of short-number'd
 hours,

But all alone stands hugely politic,
 That it nor grows with heat, nor drowns with
 showers.

To this I witness call the fools of time,
 Which die for goodness, who have lived for
 crime.—124.

Were 't aught to me I bore the canopy,
 With my extern the outward honouring.

Or laid great bases for eternity,
Which prove more short than waste or ruining?
Have I not seen dwellers on form and favour
Lose all, and more, by paying too much rent,
For compound sweet foregoing simple savour,
Pitiful thrivers, in their gazing spent?
No;—let me be obsequious in thy heart,
And take thou my oblation, poor but free,
Which is not mix'd with seconds, knows no
art,

But mutual render, only me for thee.

Hence, thou suborn'd informer! a true
soul,

When most impeach'd, stands least in thy
control.—125.

Dr. Drake, in maintaining that the Sonnets, from the 1st to the 126th, were addressed to Lord Southampton, has alleged, as "one of the most striking proofs of this position," the fact "that the language of the Dedication to the 'Rape of Lucrece,' and that of the 26th Sonnet, are almost precisely the same." If the reader will turn to this Dedication, he will at once see the resemblance. "The *love* I dedicate to your lordship is without end," shows that, in the Sonnets as in the works of contemporary writers, the perpetually recurring terms of *love* and *lover* were meant to convey the most profound respect as well as the strongest affection. In that age friendship was not considered as a mere conventional intercourse for social gratification. There was depth and strength in it. It partook of the spiritual energy which belonged to a higher philosophy of the affections than now presides over clubs and dinner-parties. "My friend," or "my lover," meant something more than one who is ordinarily civil, returns our calls, and shakes hands upon great occasions. Lord Southampton, in a letter of introduction to a grave Lord Chancellor, calls Shakspeare "my especial friend." To Lord Southampton Shakspeare dedicates "love without end." This 26th Sonnet, we have little doubt, is *also* a dedication, accompanying some new production of the mighty dramatist, in accordance with his declaration, "What I have done is yours, what I have to do is yours, being part in all I have devoted yours:—"

Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage
Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit,
To thee I send this written embassage,
To witness duty, not to show my wit.
Duty so great, which wit so poor as mine
May make seem bare, in wanting words to
show it;

But that I hope some good conceit of thine
In thy soul's thought, all naked, will be-
stow it:

Till whatsoever star that guides by moving,
Points on me graciously with fair aspect,
And puts apparel on my tatter'd loving,
To show me worthy of thy sweet respect:

Then may I dare to boast how I do love
thee,

Till then, not show my head where thou
mayst prove me.—26.

The Sonnet which precedes this has also the marked character of the same respectful affection; and, like the 26th, in all probability accompanied some offering of friendship:—

Let those who are in favour with their stars
Of public honour and proud titles boast,
Whilst I, whom fortune of such triumph bars,
Unlook'd for joy in that I honour most.
Great princes' favourites their fair leaves
spread,

But as the marigold at the sun's eye;
And in themselves their pride lies buried,
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd:

Then happy I, that love and am beloved,
Where I may not remove, nor be removed.

—25.

Again, the 23rd Sonnet is precisely of the same character. All these appear to us wholly unconnected with the poems which surround them—little gems, perfect in themselves, and wanting no setting to add to their beauty:—

As an unperfect actor on the stage,
Who with his fear is put besides his part,
Or some fierce thing replete with too much
rage,
Whose strength's abundance weakens his own
heart;

So I, for fear of trust, forget to say
The perfect ceremony of love's rite,
And in mine own love's strength seem to
decay,
O'ercharged with burthen of mine own love's
might.

O let my books be then the eloquence
And dumb presagers of my speaking breast;
Who plead for love, and look for recompence,
More than that tongue that more hath more
express'd.

O learn to read what silent love hath writ:
To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine
wit.—23.

Between the 23rd and 25th Sonnets, which
we have just given—remarkable as they are
for the most exquisite simplicity of thought
and diction—occurs the following *conceit* :—

Mine eye hath play'd the painter, and hath
stell'd

Thy beauty's form in table of my heart;
My body is the frame wherein 't is held,
And perspective it is best painter's art.
For through the painter must you see his
skill,

To find where your true image pictured lies,
Which in my bosom's shop is hanging still,
That hath his windows glazed with thine
eyes.

Now see what good turns eyes for eyes have
done;

Mine eyes have drawn thy shape, and thine
for me

Are windows to my breast, where-through the
sun

Delights to peep, to gaze therein on thee;

Yet eyes this cunning want to grace their
art,

They draw but what they see, know not
the heart.—24.

But, separated by a long interval, we find
two variations of the air, entirely out of
place where they occur. Can we doubt that
these three form one little poem of them-
selves?—

Mine eye and heart are at a mortal war,
How to divide the conquest of thy sight;
Mine eye my heart thy picture's sight would
bar,

My heart mine eye the freedom of that right.

My heart doth plead, that thou in him dost
lie,

(A closet never pierced with crystal eyes,)

But the defendant doth that plea deny,

And says in him thy fair appearance lies.

To 'cide this title is impannelled

A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart;

And by their verdict is determined

The clear eye's moiety, and the dear heart's
part:

As thus: mine eye's due is thine outward
part,

And my heart's right thine inward love of
heart.—46.

Betwixt mine eye and heart a league is took,
And each doth good turns now unto the
other:

When that mine eye is famish'd for a look,

Or heart in love with sighs himself doth
smother,

With my love's picture then my eye doth
feast,

And to the painted banquet bids my heart:

Another time mine eye is my heart's guest,

And in his thoughts of love doth share a
part:

So, either by thy picture or my love,

Thyself away art present still with me;

For thou not farther than my thoughts canst
move,

And I am still with them, and they with
thee;

Or if they sleep, thy picture in my sight

Awakes my heart to heart's and eye's
delight.—47.

The 77th Sonnet interrupts the continuity
of a poem which we shall presently give, in
which the writer refers, with some appear-
ance of jealousy, to an "alien pen." There
can be no doubt that this Sonnet is com-
pletely isolated. It is clearly intended to
accompany the present of a note-book :—

Thy glass will show thee how thy beauties
wear,

Thy dial how thy precious minutes waste;

The vacant leaves thy mind's imprint will
bear,

And of this book this learning mayst thou
taste.

The wrinkles which thy glass will truly show,
Of mouthed graves will give thee memory;

Thou by thy dial's shady stealth mayst know
Time's thievish progress to eternity.

Look, what thy memory cannot contain,
Commit to these waste blanks, and thou shalt
find

Those children nurs'd, deliver'd from thy
brain,

To take a new acquaintance of thy mind.

These offices, so oft as thou wilt look,

Shall profit thee, and much enrich thy
book.—77.

The 76th to the 87th Sonnets (omitting the 77th and 81st) have been held to refer to a particular event in the poetical career of Shakspeare. He expresses something like jealousy of a rival poet—a "better spirit." By some, Spenser is supposed to be alluded to; by others, Daniel. But we do not accept these stanzas as a proof that William Herbert is the person always addressed in these Sonnets, for the alleged reason that Daniel was patronised by the Pembroke family, and that, in 1601, he dedicated a book to William Herbert, to which Shakspeare is held to allude in the 82nd Sonnet, by the expression "dedicated words." This is Mr. Boaden's theory. One of the Sonnets, supposed also to refer to William Herbert as "a man right fair," was published in 1599, when the young nobleman was only nineteen years of age. But in the stanzas which relate to some poetical rivalry, real or imaginary, the person addressed has

"added feathers to the learned's wing,
And given grace a double majesty."

He is

"as fair in knowledge as in hue."

The praises of the "lovely boy," be he William Herbert or not, are always confined to his personal appearance and his good nature. There is a quiet tone about the following which separates them from the Sonnets addressed to that "unknown youth;" and yet they may be as unreal as we believe most of those to be:—

Why is my verse so barren of new pride?

So far from variation or quick change?

Why, with the time, do I not glance aside

To new-found methods and to compounds
strange?

Why write I still all one, ever the same,
And keep invention in a noted weed,
That every word doth almost tell my name,
Showing their birth, and where they did
proceed?

O know, sweet love, I always write of you,
And you and love are still my argument;
So all my best is dressing old words new,
Spending again what is already spent:

For, as the sun is daily new and old,

So is my love still telling what is told.—76.

So oft have I invok'd thee for my muse,
And found such fair assistance in my verse,
As every alien pen hath got my use,
And under thee their poesy disperse.
Thine eyes, that taught the dumb on high to
sing,

And heavy ignorance aloft to fly,
Have added feathers to the learned's wing,
And given grace a double majesty.

Yet be most proud of that which I compile,
Whose influence is thine, and born of thee:
In others' works thou dost but mend the
style,

And arts with thy sweet graces graced be;
But thou art all my art, and dost advance
As high as learning my rude ignorance.

—78.

Whilst I alone did call upon thy aid,
My verse alone had all thy gentle grace;
But now my gracious numbers are decay'd,
And my sick muse doth give another place.
I grant, sweet love, thy lovely argument
Deserves the travail of a worthier pen;
Yet what of thee thy poet doth invent,
He robs thee of, and pays it thee again.
He lends thee virtue, and he stole that word
From thy behaviour; beauty doth he give,
And found it in thy cheek; he can afford
No praise to thee but what in thee doth live.

Then thank him not for that which he doth
say,

Since what he owes thee thou thyself dost
pay.—79.

O, how I faint when I of you do write,
Knowing a better spirit doth use your name,
And in the praise thereof spends all his might,
To make me tongue-tied, speaking of your
fame!

But since your worth (wide, as the ocean is,)
The humble as the proudest sail doth bear,

My saucy bark, inferior far to his,
 On your broad main doth wilfully appear.
 Your shallowest help will hold me up afloat,
 Whilst he upon your soundless deep doth
 ride ;
 Or, being wreck'd, I am a worthless boat,
 He of tall building, and of goodly pride :
 Then if he thrive, and I be cast away,
 The worst was this ;—my love was my
 decay.—80.

I grant thou wert not married to my muse,
 And therefore mayst without attaint o'erlook
 The dedicated words which writers use
 Of their fair subject, blessing every book.
 Thou art as fair in knowledge as in hue,
 Finding thy worth a limit past my praise ;
 And therefore art enforced to seek anew
 Some fresher stamp of the time-bettering days.
 And do so, love ; yet when they have devis'd
 What strained touches rhetoric can lend,
 Thou truly fair wert truly sympathiz'd
 In true plain words, by thy true-telling
 friend ;
 And their gross painting might be better
 us'd
 Where cheeks need blood ; in thee it is
 abus'd.—82.

I never saw that you did painting need,
 And therefore to your fair no painting set.
 I found, or thought I found, you did exceed
 The barren tender of a poet's debt :
 And therefore have I slept in your report,
 That you yourself, being extant, well might
 show
 How far a modern quill doth come too short,
 Speaking of worth, what worth in you doth
 grow.
 This silence for my sin you did impute,
 Which shall be most my glory, being dumb ;
 For I impair not beauty being mute,
 When others would give life, and bring a
 tomb.
 There lives more life in one of your fair
 eyes
 Than both your poets can in praise devise.
 —83.
 Who is it that says most ? which can say more
 Than this rich praise,—that you alone are
 you ?
 In whose confine immured is the store
 Which should example where your equal grew.

Lean penury within that pen doth dwell,
 That to his subject lends not some small glory ;
 But he that writes of you, if he can tell
 That you are you, so dignifies his story,
 Let him but copy what in you is writ,
 Not making worse what nature made so clear,
 And such a counterpart shall fame his wit,
 Making his style admired everywhere.

You to your beauteous blessings add a curse,
 Being fond on praise, which makes your
 praises worse.—84.

My tongue-tied muse in manners holds her
 still,
 While comments of your praise, richly com-
 pil'd,
 Reserve their character with golden quill,
 And precious phrase by all the muses fil'd.
 I think good thoughts, while others write good
 words,
 And, like unletter'd clerk, still cry " Amen "
 To every hymn that able spirit affords,
 In polish'd form of well-refined pen.
 Hearing you prais'd, I say, "'T is so, 't is
 true,"
 And to the most of praise add something
 more ;
 But that is in my thought, whose love to you,
 Though words come hindmost, holds his rank
 before.
 Then others for the breath of words respect,
 Me for my dumb thoughts speaking in
 effect.—85.

Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,
 Bound for the prize of all-too-precious you,
 That did my ripe thoughts in my brain in-
 hearse,
 Making their tomb the womb wherein they
 grew ?
 Was it his spirit, by spirits taught to write
 Above a mortal pitch, that struck me dead ?
 No, neither he, nor his compeers by night
 Giving him aid, my verse astonished.
 He, nor that affable familiar ghost
 Which nightly gulls him with intelligence,
 As victors, of my silence cannot boast ;
 I was not sick of any fear from thence.
 But, when your countenance fil'd up his line,
 Then lack'd I matter : that enfeebled mine.
 —86.

Farewell ! thou art too dear for my possess-
 ing,
 And like enough thou know'st thy estimate :

The charter of thy worth gives thee releasing;
My bonds in thee are all determinate.
For how do I hold thee but by thy granting?
And for that riches where is my deserving?
The cause of this fair gift in me is wanting,
And so my patent back again is swerving.
Thyself thou gav'st, thy own worth then not
knowing,

Or me, to whom thou gav'st it, else mistaking;
So thy great gift, upon misprision growing,
Comes home again, on better judgment mak-
ing.

Thus have I had thee, as a dream doth
flatter,

In sleep a king, but waking no such matter.

—87.

We cannot trace the connexion of the 121st Sonnet with what precedes and what follows it. It may stand alone—a somewhat impatient expression of contempt for the opinion of the world, which too often galls those most who, in the consciousness of right, ought to be best prepared to be indifferent to it:—

'T is better to be vile, than vile esteem'd,
When not to be receives reproach of being,
And the just pleasure lost, which is so deem'd
Not by our feeling, but by others' seeing.
For why should others' false adulterate eyes
Give salutation to my sportive blood?
Or on my frailties why are frailer spies,
Which in their wills count bad what I think
good?

No.—I am that I am; and they that level

At my abuses, reckon up their own:

I may be straight though they themselves be
bevel;

By their rank thoughts my deeds must not be
shown,

Unless this general evil they maintain,—

All men are bad, and in their badness
reign.—121.

Lastly, of the Sonnets entirely independent of the other portions of the series, the following, already mentioned, furnishes one of the many proofs which we have endeavoured to produce that the original arrangement was in many respects an arbitrary one:—

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,
Fool'd by those rebel powers that thee array,

Why dost thou pine within, and suffer dearth,
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?

Why so large cost, having so short a lease,
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?

Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,

Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?

Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,

And let that pine to aggravate thy store;

Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;

Within be fed, without be rich no more;

So shalt thou feed on death, that feeds on
men,

And, death once dead, there's no more
dying then.—146.

III.

WE have thus, with a labour which we fear may be disproportionate to the results, separated those parts of this series of poems which appeared to be manifestly complete in themselves, or not essentially connected with what has been supposed to be the "leading idea" which prevails throughout the collection. It has been said, with great eloquence, "It is true that, in the poetry as well as in the fictions of early ages, we find a more ardent tone of affection in the language of friendship than has since been usual; and yet no instance has been adduced of such rapturous devotedness, such an idolatry of admiring love, as the greatest being whom nature ever produced in the human form pours forth to some unknown youth in the majority of these Sonnets."* The same accomplished critic further speaks of the strangeness of "Shakspeare's humiliation in addressing him (the youth) as a being before whose feet he crouched, whose frown he feared, whose injuries, and those of the most insulting kind—the seduction of the mistress to whom we have alluded—he felt and bewailed without resenting." We should agree with Mr. Hallam, *if these circumstances were manifest*, that, notwithstanding the frequent beauties of these Sonnets, the pleasure of their perusal would be much diminished. But we believe that these impressions have been, in a great degree, produced by regard-

* Hallam, 'Literature of Europe,' vol. iii. p. 502.

ing the original arrangement as the natural and proper one—as one suggested by the dependence of one part upon another, in a poem essentially continuous. Mr. Hallam, with these impressions, adds, somewhat strongly, “it is impossible not to wish that Shakspeare had never written them.” Let us, however, analyze what we have presented to the reader in a different order than that of the original edition:—

I.					Sonnets.
<i>Will</i>	.	.	.	.	3
<i>Black eyes</i>	.	.	.	.	3
<i>The virginal</i>	.	.	.	.	1
<i>False compare</i>	.	.	.	.	2
<i>Tyranny</i>	.	.	.	.	3
<i>Slavery</i>	.	.	.	.	2
<i>Coldness</i>	.	.	.	.	1
<i>I hate not you</i>	.	.	.	.	1
<i>The little love-god</i> (not reprinted)	.	.	.	.	2
<i>Love and hatred</i>	.	.	.	.	10
<i>Infidelity</i>	.	.	.	.	3
<i>Injury</i>	.	.	.	.	6
<i>A friend's faults</i>	.	.	.	.	3
<i>Forgiveness</i>	.	.	.	.	3
					43

II.					Sonnets.
<i>Confiding friendship</i>	.	.	.	.	4
<i>Humility</i>	.	.	.	.	4
<i>Absence</i>	.	.	.	.	9
<i>Estrangement</i>	.	.	.	.	9
<i>A second absence</i>	.	.	.	.	3
<i>Fidelity</i>	.	.	.	.	13
<i>Dedications</i>	.	.	.	.	3
<i>The picture</i>	.	.	.	.	3
<i>The note-book</i>	.	.	.	.	1
<i>Rivalry</i>	.	.	.	.	10
<i>Reputation</i>	.	.	.	.	1
<i>The soul</i>	.	.	.	.	1
					61

We have thus as many as 104 Sonnets which, if they had been differently arranged upon their original publication, might have been read with undiminished pleasure, as far as regards the strangeness of their author's humiliation before one unknown youth; and

have therefore left us no regret that he had written them. If we are to regard a few of these as real disclosures, with reference to a “dark-haired lady whom the poet loved, but over whose relations to him there is thrown a veil of mystery, allowing us to see little except the feeling of the parties—that their love was guilt,”—we are to consider, what is so justly added by the writer from whom we quote, that “much that is most unpleasing in the circumstances connected with those magnificent lyrics is removed by the air of despondency and remorse which breathes through those which come most closely on the facts.”* But it must not be forgotten that, in an age when the Italian models of poetry were so diligently cultivated, imaginary loves and imaginary jealousies were freely admitted into verses which appeared to address themselves to the reader in the personal character of the poet. Regarding a poem, whether a sonnet or an epic, essentially as a work of *art*, the artist was not careful to separate his own identity from the sentiments and situations which he delineated—any more than the pastoral poets of the next century were solicitous to tell their readers that their Corydons and Phyllises were not absolutely themselves and their mistresses. The ‘Amoretti’ of Spenser, for example, consisting of eighty-eight Sonnets, is also a puzzle to all those who regard such productions as necessarily autobiographical. These poems were published in 1596; in several passages a date is somewhat distinctly marked, for there are lines which refer to the completion of the first six Books of the ‘Fairy Queen,’ and to Spenser’s appointment to the laureatship—“the badge which I do bear.” And yet they are full of the complaints of an unrequited love, and of a disdainful mistress, at a period when Spenser was married, and settled with his family in Ireland. Chalmers is here again ready with his solution of the difficulty. They were addressed, as well as Shakspeare’s Sonnets, to Queen Elizabeth. We believe that, taken as works of art, having a certain degree of continuity, the Sonnets of Spenser, of Daniel, of Drayton, of Shakspeare, although

* ‘Edinburgh Review,’ vol. lxxi. p. 466.

in many instances they might shadow forth real feelings, and be outpourings of the inmost heart, were presented to the world as exercises of fancy, and were received by the world as such. The most usual form which such compositions assumed was that of love-verses. Spenser's 'Amoretti' are entirely of this character, as their name implies; Daniel's, which are fifty-seven in number, are all addressed "To Delia;" Drayton's, which he calls "Ideas," are somewhat more miscellaneous in their character. These were the three great poets of Shakspeare's days. Spenser's 'Amoretti' was first printed in 1595; Daniel's 'Delia' in 1592; Drayton's 'Ideas' in 1594. In 1593 was also published 'Licia, or Poems of Love, in honour of the admirable and singular virtues of his Lady.' This book contains fifty-two Sonnets, all conceived in the language of passionate affection and extravagant praise. And yet the author, in his Address to the Reader, says—"If thou muse what my Licia is, take her to be some Diana, at the least chaste, or some Minerva, no Venus, fairer far. It may be she is Learning's image, or some heavenly wonder, which the precisest may not mislike: perhaps under that name I have shadowed Discipline." This fashion of Sonnet-writing upon a continuous subject prevailed, thus, about the period of the publication of the 'Venus and Adonis' and the 'Lucrece,' when Shakspeare had taken his rank amongst the poets of his time—independent of his dramatic rank. He chose a new subject for a series of Sonnets; he addressed them to some youth, some imaginary person, as we conceive; he made this fiction the vehicle for stringing together a succession of brilliant images, exhausting every artifice of language to present one idea under a thousand different forms—

"varying to other words;
And in this change is my invention spent."

Coleridge, with his usual critical discrimination, speaking of the Italian poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and glancing also at our own of the same period, says, "In opposition to the present age, and perhaps in as faulty an extreme, they placed the essence of poetry in the *art*. The ex-

cellence at which they aimed consisted in the exquisite polish of the diction, combined with perfect simplicity."* This, we apprehend, is the characteristic excellence of Shakspeare's Sonnets; displaying, to the careful reader "the studied position of words and phrases, so that not only each part should be melodious in itself, but contribute to the harmony of the whole." He sought for a canvas in which this elaborate colouring, this skilful management of light and shade, might be attempted, in an address to a young man, instead of a scornful Delia or a proud Daphne; and he commenced with an exhortation to that young man to marry. To allow of that energy of language which would result from the assumption of strong feeling, THE POET links himself with the young man's happiness by the strongest expressions of friendship—in the common language of that day, love. We say, advisedly, *the poet*; for it is in this character that the connexion between the two friends is preserved throughout; and it is in this character that the personal beauty of the young man is made a constantly recurring theme. With these imperfect observations, we present the continuous poem which appears in the first nineteen Sonnets:—

From fairest creatures we desire increase,
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
But as the ripper should by time decease,
His tender heir might bear his memory:
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
Feed'st thy light's flame with self-substantial
fuel,

Making a famine where abundance lies,
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament,
And only herald to the gaudy spring,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content,
And, tender churl, mak'st waste in niggarding.
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and
thee.—1.

When forty winters shall besiege thy brow,
And dig deep trenches in thy beauty's field,
Thy youth's proud livery, so gaz'd on now,
Will be a tatter'd weed, of small worth held:

* 'Biographia Literaria,' vol. ii. p. 27.

Then being ask'd where all thy beauty lies,
Where all the treasure of thy lusty days;
To say, within thine own deep sunken eyes,
Were an all-eating shame, and thriftless praise.
How much more praise deserv'd thy beauty's
use,

If thou couldst answer—"This fair child of
mine

Shall sum my count, and make my old ex-
cuse—"

Proving his beauty by succession thine!

This were to be new-made when thou art
old,

And see thy blood warm when thou feel'st
it cold.—2.

Look in thy glass, and tell the face thou
viewest,

Now is the time that face should form another;
Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest,
Thou dost beguile the world, unbless some
mother.

For where is she so fair, whose unear'd womb
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry?

Or who is he so fond will be the tomb

Of his self-love, to stop posterity?

Thou art thy mother's glass, and she in thee

Calls back the lovely April of her prime:

So thou through windows of thine age shalt
see,

Despite of wrinkles, this thy golden time.

But, if thou live remember'd not to be,

Die single, and thine image dies with thee.

—3.

Unthrifty loveliness, why dost thou spend

Upon thyself thy beauty's legacy?

Nature's bequest gives nothing, but doth lend,

And, being frank, she lends to those are free.

Then, beauteous niggard, why dost thou abuse

The bounteous largess given thee to give?

Profitless usurer, why dost thou use

So great a sum of sums, yet canst not live?

For having traffic with thyself alone,

Thou of thyself thy sweet self dost deceive.

Then how, when nature calls thee to be gone,

What acceptable audit canst thou leave?

Thy unus'd beauty must be tomb'd with
thee,

Which, used, lives thy executor to be.—4.

Those hours, that with gentle work did frame

The lovely gaze where every eye doth dwell,

Will play the tyrants to the very same,

And that unfair which fairly doth excel;

For never-resting time leads summer on
To hideous winter, and confounds him there:
Sap check'd with frost, and lusty leaves quite
gone,

Beauty o'ersnow'd, and bareness everywhere:

Then, were not summer's distillation left,

A liquid prisoner pent in walls of glass,

Beauty's effect with beauty were bereft,

Nor it, nor no remembrance what it was.

But flowers distill'd, though they with
winter meet,

Leese but their show; their substance still
lives sweet.—5.

Then let not winter's ragged hand deface

In thee thy summer, ere thou be distill'd:

Make sweet some phial; treasure thou some
place

With beauty's treasure, ere it be self-kill'd.

That use is not forbidden usury,

Which happies those that pay the willing loan;

That's for thyself to breed another thee,

Or ten times happier, be it ten for one;

Ten times thyself were happier than thou art,

If ten of thine ten times refigur'd thee:

Then, what could Death do if thou shouldst
depart,

Leaving the living in posterity?

Be not self-will'd for thou art much too fair

To be Death's conquest, and make worms
thine heir.—6.

Lo, in the orient when the gracious light

Lifts up his burning head, each under eye

Doth homage to his new-appearing sight,

Serving with looks his sacred majesty:

And having climb'd the steep-up heavenly
hill,

Resembling strong youth in his middle age,

Yet mortal looks adore his beauty still,

Attending on his golden pilgrimage;

But when from high-most pitch, with weary
car,

Like feeble age, he reeleth from the day,

The eyes, 'fore duteous, now converted are

From his low tract, and look another way:

So thou, thyself outgoing in thy noon,

Unlook'd on diest, unless thou get a son.—7.

Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?

Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy,

Why lov'st thou that which thou receiv'st not
gladly?

Or else receiv'st with pleasure thine annoy?

If the true concord of well-tuned sounds,
 By unions married, do offend thine ear,
 They do but sweetly chide thee, who confounds
 In singleness the parts that thou shouldst bear.
 Mark how one string, sweet husband to
 another,
 Strikes each in each by mutual ordering;
 Resembling sire and child and happy mother,
 Who all in one, one pleasing note do sing:
 Whose speechless song, being many, seem-
 ing one,
 Sings this to thee, "Thou single wilt prove
 none."—8.

Is it for fear to wet a widow's eye,
 That thou consum'st thyself in single life?
 Ah! if thou issueless shalt hap to die,
 The world will wail thee, like a makeless wife:
 The world will be thy widow, and still weep,
 That thou no form of thee hast left behind,
 When every private widow well may keep,
 By children's eyes, her husband's shape in
 mind.
 Look, what an unthrift in the world doth
 spend,
 Shifts but his place, for still the world enjoys
 it:
 But beauty's waste hath in the world an end,
 And kept unus'd, the user so destroys it.
 No love toward others in that bosom sits,
 That on himself such murderous shame
 commits.—9.

For shame! deny that thou bear'st love to any
 Who for thyself art so unprovident.
 Grant, if thou wilt, thou art lov'd of many,
 But that thou none lov'st is most evident;
 For thou art so possess'd with murderous hate,
 That 'gainst thyself thou stick'st not to con-
 spire;
 Seeking that beauteous roof to ruinate,
 Which to repair should be thy chief desire.
 O change thy thought, that I may change my
 mind!
 Shall hate be fairer lodg'd than gentle love?
 Be as thy presence is, gracious and kind,
 Or to thyself, at least, kind-hearted prove;
 Make thee another self, for love of me,
 That beauty still may live in thine or
 thee.—10.

As fast as thou shalt wane, so fast thou grow'st
 In one of thine, from that which thou de-
 partest;

And that fresh blood which youngly thou
 bestow'st,
 Thou mayst call thine, when thou from youth
 convertest.
 Herein lives wisdom, beauty, and increase;
 Without this, folly, age, and cold decay:
 If all were minded so, the times should cease,
 And threescore years would make the world
 away.
 Let those whom Nature hath not made for
 store,
 Harsh, featureless, and rude, barrenly perish:
 Look, whom she best endow'd, she gave thee
 more;
 Which bounteous gift thou shouldst in bounty
 cherish:
 She carv'd thee for her seal, and meant
 thereby
 Thou shouldst print more, nor let that copy
 die.—11.

When I do count the clock that tells the time,
 And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;
 When I behold the violet past prime,
 And sable curls, all silver'd o'er with white;
 When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,
 Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,
 And summer's green all girded up in sheaves,
 Borne on the bier with white and bristly
 beard;
 Then of thy beauty do I question make,
 That thou among the wastes of time must go,
 Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,
 And die as fast as they see others grow;
 And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make
 defence,
 Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee
 hence.—12.

O that you were yourself! but, love, you are
 No longer yours than you yourself here live:
 Against this coming end you should prepare,
 And your sweet semblance to some other give.
 So should that beauty which you hold in lease
 Find no determination: then you were
 Yourself again, after yourself's decease,
 When your sweet issue your sweet form should
 bear.

Who lets so fair a house fall to decay,
 Which husbandry in honour might uphold
 Against the stormy gusts of winter's day,
 And barren rage of death's eternal cold?

O! none but unthrifths:—Dear my love, you
 know
 You had a father; let your son say so.—13.

Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck ;
 And yet methinks I have astronomy,
 But not to tell of good or evil luck,
 Of plagues, of dearths, or season's quality :
 Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,
 Pointing to each his thunder, rain, and wind,
 Or say, with princes if it shall go well,
 By oft predict that I in heaven find :
 But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,
 And (constant stars) in them I read such art,
 As truth and beauty shall together thrive,
 If from thyself to store thou wouldst convert :
 Or else of thee this I prognosticate,
 Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and
 date.—14.

When I consider everything that grows
 Holds in perfection but a little moment,
 That this huge state presenteth nought but
 shows
 Whereon the stars in secret influence com-
 ment ;
 When I perceive that men as plants increase,
 Cheer'd and check'd ever by the selfsame sky ;
 Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
 And wear their brave state out of memory ;
 Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
 Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,
 Where wasteful time debateth with decay,
 To change your day of youth to sullied night ;
 And all in war with time, for love of you,
 As he takes from you, I engraft you new.
 —15.

But wherefore do not you a mightier way
 Make war upon this bloody tyrant, Time ?
 And fortify yourself in your decay
 With means more blessed than my barren
 rhyme ?
 Now stand you on the top of happy hours ;
 And many maiden gardens, yet unset,
 With virtuous wish would bear you living
 flowers,
 Much liker than your painted counterfeit :
 So should the lines of life that life repair,
 Which this, Time's pencil, or my pupil pen,
 Neither in inward worth, nor outward fair,
 Can make you live yourself in eyes of men.
 To give away yourself, keeps yourself still ;
 And you must live, drawn by your own
 sweet skill.—16.

Who will believe my verse in time to come,
 If it were fill'd with your most high deserts ?

Though yet Heaven knows it is but as a tomb
 Which hides your life, and shows not half
 your parts.

If I could write the beauty of your eyes,
 And in fresh numbers number all your graces,
 The age to come would say, This poet lies,
 Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly
 faces.

So should my papers, yellow'd with their age,
 Be scorn'd, like old men of less truth than
 tongue ;

And your true rights be term'd a poet's rage,
 And stretched metre of an antique song :

But were some child of yours alive that
 time,

You should live twice ;—in it, and in my
 rhyme.—17.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day ?
 Thou art more lovely and more temperate :
 Rough winds do shake the darling buds of
 May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date :
 Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
 And often is his gold complexion dimm'd ;
 And every fair from fair sometime declines,
 By chance, or nature's changing course, un-
 trimm'd ;

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
 Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest :
 Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his
 shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou growest :
 So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
 So long lives this, and this gives life to
 thee.—18.

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
 And make the earth devour her own sweet
 brood ;

Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's
 jaws,

And burn the long-liv'd phoenix in her blood ;
 Make glad and sorry seasons, as thou fleets,
 And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,
 To the wide world, and all her fading sweets ;

But I forbid thee one most heinous crime :
 O carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,
 Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen ;
 Him in thy course untainted do allow,
 For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.

Yet, do thy worst, old Time : despite thy
 wrong,

My love shall in my verse ever live young.
 —19.

That this series of Sonnets, powerful as they are, displaying not only the most abundant variety of imagery, but the greatest felicity in making the whole harmonious, constitutes a poem ambitious only of the honours of a work of Art, is, we think, manifest. If it had been addressed to a real person, no other object could have been proposed than a display of the most brilliant ingenuity. In the next age it would have been called an exquisite "copy of verses." But in the next age, probably—certainly in our own—the author would have been pronounced arrogant beyond measure in the anticipation of the immortality of his rhymes. There is a show of modesty, indeed, in the expressions "barren rhyme" and "pupil pen;" but that is speedily cast off, and "eternal summer" is promised through "eternal lines;" and

"So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee."

Regarding these nineteen Sonnets as a continuous poem, wound up to the climax of a hyperbolical promise of immortality to the object whom it addresses, we receive the 20th Sonnet as the commencement of another poem in which the same idea is retained. The poet is bound to the youth by ties of strong affection; but nature has called upon the possessor of that beauty

"Which steals men's eyes, and women's souls
amazeth,"

to cultivate closer ties. This Sonnet, through an utter misconception of the language of Shakspeare's time, has produced a comment sufficiently odious to throw an unpleasant shade over much which follows. The idea which it contains is continued in the 53rd Sonnet; and we give the two in connexion:—

A woman's face, with nature's own hand
painted,
Hast thou, the master-mistress of my passion;
A woman's gentle heart, but not acquainted
With shifting change, as is false women's
fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in
rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;

A man in hue, all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men's eyes, and women's souls
amazeth.

And for a woman wert thou first created;
Till Nature, as she wrought thee, fell a
doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.
But since she prick'd thee out for women's
pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love's use their
treasure.—20.

What is your substance, whereof are you
made,
That millions of strange shadows on you
tend?

Since every one hath, every one, one's shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend.
Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit
Is poorly imitated after you;
On Helen's cheek all art of beauty set,
And you in Grecian tires are painted new:
Speak of the spring and foison of the year;
The one doth shadow of your beauty show,
The other as your bounty doth appear,
And you in every blessed shape we know.

In all external grace you have some part,
But you like none, none you, for constant
heart.—53.

Between the 20th Sonnet and the 53rd occur, as it appears to us, a number of fragments which we have variously classified, and which seem to have no relation to the praises of that "unknown youth" who has been supposed to preside over five-sixths of the entire series of verses. We have little doubt that the "begetter" of the Sonnets was not able to beget, or obtain, all; and that there is a considerable hiatus between the 20th Sonnet and the second hyperbolical close, which he filled up as well as he could, from other "sugared sonnets amongst private friends:"—

O how much more doth beauty beauteous
seem,
By that sweet ornament which truth doth
give!
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.
The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye
As the perfumed tincture of the roses,

Hang on such thorns and play as wantonly
When summer's breath their masked buds
discloses :

But, for their virtue only is their show,
They live unwoo'd, and unrespected fade ;
Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so ;
Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours
made :

And so of you, beauteous and lovely youth,
When that shall fade, by verse distils your
truth.—54.

Not marble, not the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme ;
But you shall shine more bright in these con-
tents

Than unswept stone, besmear'd with sluttish
time.

When wasteful war shall statues overturn,
And broils root out the work of masonry,
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall
burn

The living record of your memory.

'Gainst death and all oblivious enmity

Shall you pace forth ; your praise shall still
find room,

Even in the eyes of all posterity

That wear this world out to the ending doom.

So till the judgment that yourself arise,

You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.

—55.

Wherever we meet with these magnificent promises of the immortality which the poet's verses are to bestow, we find them associated with that personage, the representative at once of "Adonis" and of "Helen," who presents himself to us as the unreal coinage of the fancy. In many of the lines which we have given in the second division of this inquiry, the reader will have noticed the affecting modesty, the humility without abasement, of the great poet comparing himself with others. Here Shakspeare indeed speaks. For example, take the whole of the 32nd Sonnet. We should scarcely imagine, if the poem were continuous, as Mr. Brown believes, that the last stanza of the second portion of it in his classification would conclude with these lines :—

"Not marble, not the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive *this powerful rhyme.*"

They contrast remarkably with the tone of the 32nd Sonnet,—

"These *poor rude lines* of thy deceased lover."

Meres has a passage : "As Ovid saith of his works—

'Jamque opus exegi quod nec Jovis ira, nec
ignis,

Nec poterit ferrum, nec edax abolere vetus-
tas ;'

and as Horace saith of his,

'Exegi monumentum ære perenniu &c. ;

so say *I* severally of Sir Philip Sidney's, Spenser's, Daniel's, Drayton's, *Shakespeare's*, and Warner's works." What Ovid and Horace said is imitated in the 55th Sonnet. But we greatly doubt if what Meres would have said of Shakspeare he would have said of himself, except in some assumed character, to which we have not the key. Ben Jonson, to whom a boastful spirit has with some justice been objected, never said anything so strong of his own writings ; and he wrote with too much reliance, in this and other particulars, upon classical examples. But Jonson was not a writer of Sonnets, which, pitched in an artificial key, made this boastful tone a constituent part of the whole performance. The *man*, who never once speaks of his own merits in his dramas, the greatest productions of the human intellect, when he put on the imaginary character in which a *poet* is weaving a fiction out of his supposed personal relations, did not hesitate to conform himself to the practice of other masters of the art. Shakspeare here adopted the tone which Spenser, Daniel, and Drayton had adopted. The parallel appears to us very remarkable ; and we must beg the indulgence of our readers while we present them a few passages from each of these writers.

And first of Spenser. His 27th Sonnet will furnish an adequate notion of the general tone of his 'Amoretti,' and of the self-exaltation which appears to belong to this species of poem :—

"Fair Proud ! now tell me, why should fair be
proud,

Sith all world's glory is but dross unclean,
And in the shade of death itself shall shroud,
However now thereof ye little ween !

That goodly idol, now so gay beseen,
 Shall doff her flesh's borrow'd fair attire;
 And be forgot as it had never been;
 That many now much worship and admire!
 Ne any then shall after it inquire,
 Ne any mention shall thereof remain,
 But what this verse, that never shall expire,
 Shall to you purchase with her thankless pain!
 Fair! be no longer proud of that shall perish,
 But that, which shall you make immortal,
 cherish."

And the 69th Sonnet is still more like the model upon which Shakspeare formed his 55th:—

"The famous warriors of the antique world
 Us'd trophies to erect in stately wise,
 In which they would the records have enroll'd
 Of their great deeds and valorous emprise.
 What trophy then shall I most fit devise,
 In which I may record the memory
 Of my love's conquest, peerless beauty's prize,
 Adorn'd with honour, love, and chastity?
 Even this verse, vow'd to eternity,
 Shall be thereof immortal monument;
 And tell her praise to all posterity,
 That may admire such world's rare wonder-
 ment;
 The happy purchase of my glorious spoil,
 Gotten at last with labour and long toil."

Spenser's 75th Sonnet also thus closes:

"My verse your virtues rare shall eternize,
 And in the heavens write your glorious name.
 Where, when as Death shall all the world
 subdue,
 Our love shall live, and later life renew."

Of Daniel's Sonnets, the 41st and 42nd furnish examples of the same tone, though somewhat more subdued than in Shakspeare or Spenser:—

"Be not displeas'd that these my papers should
 Bewray unto the world how fair thou art;
 Or that my wits have show'd the best they
 could.
 (The chastest flame that ever warmed heart!)
 Think not, sweet Delia, this shall be thy shame,
 My muse should sound thy praise with mourn-
 ful warble;
 How many live, the glory of whose name
 Shall rest in ice, when thine is grav'd in
 marble!
 Thou mayst in after ages live esteem'd,
 Unburied in these lines, reserv'd in pureness;
 These shall entomb those eyes, that have re-
 deem'd
 Me from the vulgar, thee from all obscureness.
 Although my careful accents never mov'd
 thee,
 Yet count it no disgrace that I have lov'd
 thee."

"Delia, these eyes, that so admire thine,
 Have seen those walls which proud ambition
 rear'd
 To check the world; how they entomb'd have
 lien
 Within themselves, and on them ploughs have
 ear'd.
 Yet never found that barbarous hand attain'd
 The spoil of fame deserv'd by virtuous men;
 Whose glorious actions luckily had gain'd
 The eternal annals of a happy pen.
 And therefore grieve not if thy beauties die;
 Though time do spoil thee of the fairest veil
 That ever yet cover'd mortality;
 And must enstar the needle and the rail.
 That grace which doth more than enwoman
 thee,
 Lives in my lines, and must eternal be."

But Drayton, if he display not the energy of Shakspeare, the fancy of Spenser, or the sweetness of Daniel, is not behind either in the extravagance of his admiration or his confidence in his own power. The 6th and the 44th 'Ideas' are sufficient examples:—

"How many paltry, foolish, painted things,
 That now in coaches trouble every street,
 Shall be forgotten, whom no poet sings,
 Ere they be well wrapp'd in their winding-
 sheet!
 When I to thee eternity shall give,
 When nothing else remaineth of these days,
 And queens hereafter shall be glad to live
 Upon the alms of thy superfluous praise;
 Virgins and matrons, reading these my rhymes,
 Shall be so much delighted with thy story,
 That they shall grieve they liv'd not in these
 times,
 To have seen thee, their sex's only glory:
 So thou shalt fly above the vulgar throng,
 Still to survive in my immortal song."

"Whilst thus my pen strives to eternize thee,
 Age rules my lines with wrinkles in my face,
 Where, in the map of all my misery,
 Is modell'd out the world of my disgrace:
 Whilst, in despite of tyrannizing rhymes,
 Medea-like, I make thee young again,
 Proudly thou scorn'st my world out-wearing
 rhymes,
 And murther'st virtue with thy coy disdain;
 And though in youth my youth untimely
 perish,
 To keep thee from oblivion and the grave,
 Ensuing ages yet my rhymes shall cherish,
 Where I entomb'd my better part shall save;
 And though this earthly body fade and die,
 My name shall mount upon eternity."

We now proceed to what appears another continuous poem amongst Shakspeare's Sonnets, addressed to the same object as the

first nineteen stanzas were addressed to, and devoted to the same admiration of his personal beauty. The leading idea is now that of the spoils of Time, to be repaired only by the immortality of verse:—

Where art thou, Muse, that thou forgett'st so long
To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?
Spend'st thou thy fury on some worthless song,
Darkening thy power, to lend base subjects light?
Return, forgetful Muse, and straight redeem
In gentle numbers time so idly spent;
Sing to the ear that doth thy lays esteem,
And gives thy pen both skill and argument.
Rise, restive Muse, my love's sweet face survey,
If Time have any wrinkle graven there;
If any, be a satire to decay,
And make Time's spoils despised everywhere.
Give my love fame, faster than Time wastes life;
So thou prevent'st his scythe and crooked knife.—100.

O truant Muse, what shall be thy amends,
For thy neglect of truth in beauty dy'd?
Both truth and beauty on my love depends;
So dost thou too, and therein dignified.
Make answer, Muse: wilt thou not haply say,
"Truth needs no colour with his colour fix'd,
Beauty no pencil, beauty's truth to lay;
But best is best, if never intermix'd?"—
Because he needs no praise, wilt thou be dumb?
Excuse not silence so; for it lies in thee
To make him much outlive a gilded tomb,
And to be prais'd of ages yet to be.
Then do thy office, Muse; I teach thee how
To make him seem long hence as he shows now.—101.

My love is strengthen'd, though more weak
in seeming;
I love not less, though less the show appear;
That love is merchandis'd whose rich esteeming
The owner's tongue doth publish everywhere.
Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
When I was wont to greet it with my lays;
As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
And stops his pipe in growth of riper days:

Not that the summer is less pleasant now
Than when her mournful hymns did hush
the night,
But that wild music burthens every bough,
And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.

Therefore, like her, I sometime hold my tongue,
Because I would not dull you with my song.
—102.

Alack! what poverty my Muse brings forth,
That having such a scope to show her pride,
The argument, all bare, is of more worth,
Than when it hath my added praise beside.
O blame me not if I no more can write!
Look in your glass, and there appears a face
That overgoes my blunt invention quite,
Dulling my lines, and doing me disgrace.
Were it not sinful then, striving to mend,
To mar the subject that before was well?
For to no other pass my verses tend,
Than of your graces and your gifts to tell;
And more, much more, than in my verse
can sit,
Your own glass shows you when you look
in it.—103.

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,
For as you were when first your eye I eyed,
Such seems your beauty still. Three winters' cold
Have from the forest shook three summers' pride;
Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd,
In process of the seasons have I seen,
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,
Since first I saw you fresh which yet are green.
Ah! yet doth beauty, like a dial hand,
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceiv'd;
So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,
Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceiv'd.
For fear of which, hear this, thou age unbred,
Ere you were born, was beauty's summer dead.—104.

Let not my love be call'd idolatry,
Nor my beloved as an idol show,
Since all alike my songs and praises be,
To one, of one, still such, and ever so.

Kind is my love to-day, to-morrow kind,
Still constant in a wondrous excellence;
Therefore my verse, to constancy confin'd,
One thing expressing, leaves out difference.
Fair, kind, and true, is all my argument,
Fair, kind, and true, varying to other words;
And in this change is my invention spent,
Three themes in one, which wondrous scope
affords.

Fair, kind, and true, have often liv'd alone,
Which three, till now, never kept seat in
one.—105.

When in the chronicle of wasted time
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,
And beauty making beautiful old rhyme,
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,
Then in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,
I see their antique pen would have express'd
Even such a beauty as you master now.
So all their praises are but prophecies
Of this our time, all you prefiguring;
And, for they look'd but with divining eyes,
They had not skill enough your worth to
sing;

For we, which now behold these present
days,
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to
praise.—106.

Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
Of the wide world dreaming on things to
come,
Can yet the lease of my true love control,
Suppos'd as forfeit to a confin'd doom.
The mortal moon hath her eclipse endur'd,
And the sad augurs mock their own presage;
Incertainties now crown themselves assur'd,
And peace proclaims olives of endless age.
Now with the drops of this most balmy time
My love looks fresh, and Death to me sub-
scribes,
Since spite of him I'll live in this poor rhyme,
While he insults o'er dull and speechless
tribes.

And thou in this shalt find thy monument,
When tyrants' crests and tombs of brass
are spent.—107.

What's in the brain that ink may character,
Which hath not figur'd to thee my true spirit?
What's new to speak, what now to register,
That may express my love, or thy dear merit?

Nothing, sweet boy; but yet, like prayers
divine,

I must each day say o'er the very same;
Counting no old thing old, thou mine, I thine,
Even as when first I hallow'd thy fair name.
So that eternal love in love's fresh case
Weighs not the dust and injury of age,
Nor gives to necessary wrinkles place,
But makes antiquity for aye his page;
Finding the first conceit of love there bred,
Where time and outward form would show
it dead.—108.

If there be nothing new, but that which is
Hath been before, how are our brains beguil'd,
Which labouring for invention bear amiss
The second burthen of a former child!
O, that record could, with a backward look,
E'en of five hundred courses of the sun,
Show me your image in some antique book,
Since mind at first in character was done!
That I might see what the old world could
say

To this composed wonder of your frame;
Whether we are mended, or whe'r better they,
Or whether revolution be the same.

O! sure I am, the wits of former days
To subjects worse have given admiring
praise.—59.

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled
shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes
before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.
Nativity, once in the main of light,
Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,
Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,
And Time, that gave, doth now his gift con-
found.

Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,
And delves the parallels in beauty's brow;
Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,
And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow.

And yet, to times in hope, my verse shall
stand,

Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.
—60.

Of these eleven stanzas nine are consecutive
in the original, being numbered 100 to 108.
The other two, the 59th and 60th, are
certainly isolated in the first arrangement;
but the idea of the 108th glides into the

59th, and closes appropriately with the 60th. But there is a short poem which stands completely alone in the original edition, the 126th; and it is remarkable for being of a different metrical character, wanting the distinguishing feature of the Sonnet in its number of lines. Its general tendency, however, connects it with those which we have just given:—

O thou, my lovely boy, who in thy power
Dost hold Time's fickle glass, his sickle, hour;
Who hast by waning grown, and therein
show'st
Thy lovers withering, as thy sweet self
grow'st!
If Nature, sovereign mistress over wrack,
As thou goest onwards, still will pluck thee
back,
She keeps thee to this purpose, that her skill
May Time disgrace, and wretched minutes
kill.
Yet fear her, O thou minion of her pleasure;
She may detain, but not still keep, her
treasure:
Her audit, though delay'd, answer'd must be,
And her quietus is to render thee.—126.

There is an enemy as potent as Time, who cuts down the pride of youth as the flower of the field. That enemy is Death; and the poet most skilfully presents the images of mortality to his "lovely boy" in connexion with the decay of the elder friend. In this portion of the poem there is a touching simplicity, which, however, is intermingled with passages which, denoting that the *Poet* is still speaking in character, take the stanzas, in some degree, out of the range of the real:—

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,
So long as youth and thou are of one date;
But when in thee time's furrows I behold,
Then look I death my days should expiate.
For all that beauty that doth cover thee
Is but the seemly raiment of my heart,
Which in thy breast doth live, as thine in me;
How can I then be elder than thou art?
O therefore, love, be of thyself so wary,
As I not for myself but for thee will;
Bearing thy heart, which I will keep so chary,
As tender nurse her babe from faring ill.

Presume not on thy heart when mine is
slain;

Thou gav'st me thine, not to give back
again.—22.

Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,
And all my soul, and all my every part;
And for this sin there is no remedy,
It is so grounded inward in my heart.
Methinks no face so gracious is as mine,
No shape so true, no truth of such account,
And for myself mine own worth do define,
As I all other in all worths surmount.
But when my glass shows me myself indeed,
Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,
Mine own self-love quite contrary I read,
Self so self-loving were iniquity.

'T is thee (myself) that for myself I praise,
Painting my age with beauty of thy days.
—62.

Against my love shall be, as I am now,
With Time's injurious hand crush'd and
o'erworn;
When hours have drain'd his blood, and fill'd
his brow
With lines and wrinkles; when his youthful
morn
Hath travell'd on to age's steepy night;
And all those beauties, whereof now he's king,
Are vanishing or vanish'd out of sight,
Stealing away the treasure of his spring;
For such a time do I now fortify
Against confounding age's cruel knife,
That he shall never cut from memory
My sweet love's beauty, though my lover's
life.

His beauty shall in these black lines be
seen,
And they shall live, and he in them, still
green.—63.

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defac'd,
The rich-proud cost of outworn buried age;
When sometime lofty towers I see down-ras'd,
And brass eternal, slave to mortal rage;
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,
And the firm soil win of the wat'ry main,
Increasing store with loss, and loss with store;
When I have seen such interchange of state,
Or state itself confounded to decay;
Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminat—
That Time will come and take my love away.

This thought is as a death, which cannot
choose
But weep to have that which it fears to
lose.—64.

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor bound-
less sea,
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the wreckful siege of battering days,
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack!
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot
back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine
bright.—65.

Tired with all these, for restful death I cry,—
As, to behold desert a beggar born,
And needy nothing trimm'd in jollity
And purest faith unhappily forsworn,
And gilded honour shamefully misplac'd,
And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
And right perfection wrongfully disgrac'd,
And strength by limping sway disabled,
And art made tongue-tied by authority,
And folly (doctor-like) controlling skill,
And simple truth miscalled simplicity,
And captive good attending captain ill:
Tir'd with all these, from these would I be
gone,
Save that, to die, I leave my love alone.—66.

Ah! wherefore with infection should he live,
And with his presence grace impiety,
That sin by him advantage should achieve,
And lace itself with his society?
Why should false painting imitate his cheek,
And steal dead seeing of his living hue?
Why should poor beauty indirectly seek
Roses of shadow, since his rose is true?
Why should he live now Nature bankrupt is,
Beggar'd of blood to blush through lively veins?
For she hath no exchequer now but his,
And, proud of many, lives upon his gains.
O, him she stores, to show what wealth
she had,
In days long since, before these last so
bad.—67.

Thus is his cheek the map of days outworn,
When beauty liv'd and died as flowers do now,
Before these bastard signs of fair were borne,
Or durst inhabit on a living brow:
Before the golden tresses of the dead,
The right of sepulchres, were shorn away,
To live a second life on second head,
Ere beauty's dead fleece made another gay:
In him those holy antique hours are seen,
Without all ornament, itself, and true,
Making no summer of another's green,
Robbing no old to dress his beauty new;
And him as for a map doth Nature store,
To show false Art what beauty was of yore.
—68.

Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth
view
Want nothing that the thought of hearts can
mend:
All tongues (the voice of souls) give thee
that due,
Uttering bare truth, even so as foes commend,
Thine outward thus with outward praise is
crown'd;
But those same tongues that give thee so
thine own,
In other accents do this praise confound,
By seeing farther than the eye hath shown.
They look into the beauty of thy mind,
And that, in guess, they measure by thy deeds;
Then (churls) their thoughts, although their
eyes were kind,
To thy fair flower add the rank smell of
weeds:
But why thy odour matcheth not thy show,
The solve is this,—that thou dost common
grow.—69.

That thou art blam'd shall not be thy defect,
For slander's mark was ever yet the fair;
The ornament of beauty is suspect,
A crow that flies in heaven's sweetest air.
So thou be good, slander doth but approve
Thy worth the greater, being woo'd of time:
For canker vice the sweetest buds doth love,
And thou present'st a pure unstained prime.
Thou hast pass'd by the ambush of young days,
Either not assail'd, or victor being charg'd;
Yet this thy praise cannot be so thy praise,
To tie up envy, evermore enlarg'd:
If some suspect of ill mask'd not thy show,
Then thou alone kingdoms of hearts
shouldst owe.—70.

No longer mourn for me when I am dead
Than you shall hear the surly sullen bell
Give warning to the world that I am fled
From this vile world, with vilest worms to
dwell :

Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it ; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be for-
got,

If thinking on me then should make you
woe,

O, if (I say) you look upon this verse,
When I perhaps compounded am with clay,
Do not so much as my poor name rehearse ;
But let your love even with my life decay :

Lest the wise world should look into your
moan,

And mock you with me after I am gone.
—71.

O, lest the world should task you to recite
What merit liv'd in me, that you should love
After my death,—dear love, forget me quite,
For you in me can nothing worthy prove ;
Unless you would devise some virtuous lie,
To do more for me than mine own desert,
And hang more praise upon deceased I
Than niggard truth would willingly impart :
O, lest your true love may seem false in this,
That you for love speak well of me untrue,
My name be buried where my body is,
And live no more to shame nor me nor you.

For I am sham'd by that which I bring
forth,

And so should you, to love things nothing
worth.—72.

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the
cold,

Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds
sang.

In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.

This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love
more strong

To love that well which thou must leave
ere long.—73.

But be contented : when that fell arrest
Without all bail shall carry me away,
My life hath in this line some interest,
Which for memorial still with thee shall stay.
When thou reviewest this, thou dost review
The very part was consecrate to thee.
The earth can have but earth, which is his due ;
My spirit is thine, the better part of me :
So then thou hast but lost the dregs of life,
The prey of worms, my body being dead ;
The coward conquest of a wretch's knife,
Too base of thee to be remembered.

The worth of that, is that which it contains,
And that is this, and this with thee re-
mains.—74.

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,
Or you survive when I in earth am rotten ;
From hence your memory death cannot take,
Although in me each part will be forgotten.
Your name from hence immortal life shall have,
Though I, once gone, to all the world must die :
The earth can yield me but a common grave,
When you entombed in men's eyes shall lie.
Your monument shall be my gentle verse,
Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read ;
And tongues to be, your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead ;
You still shall live (such virtue hath my pen)
Where breath most breathes,—even in the
mouths of men.—81.

Thirteen of these stanzas, the 62nd to the 74th, follow in their original order. The first of the fifteen, the 22nd Sonnet, stands quite alone, although its idea is continued in the 62nd. The last of the series, the 81st, not only stands alone, but actually cuts off the undoubted connexion between the 80th and the 82nd Sonnets. The 71st to the 74th Sonnets seem bursting from a heart oppressed with a sense of its own unworthiness, and surrendered to some overwhelming misery. There is a line in the 74th which points at suicide. We cling to the belief that the sentiments here expressed are essentially dramatic. In the 32nd Sonnet, where we recognise the man Shakspeare speaking in his own modest and cheerful spirit, death is to come across his "*well-contented day*."

The opinion which we have endeavoured to sustain of the probable admixture of the artificial and the real in the Sonnets, arising

from their supposed original fragmentary state, necessarily leads to the belief that some are accurate illustrations of the poet's situation and feelings. It is collected from these Sonnets, for example, that his profession as a player was disagreeable to him; and this complaint is found amongst those portions which we have separated from the series of verses which appear to us to be written in an artificial character; it might be addressed to any one of his family, or some honoured friend, such as Lord Southampton:—

“O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means, which public manners
breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a
brand,
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand.”

But if from his professional occupation his nature was felt by him to be subdued to what it worked in,—if thence his name received a brand,—if vulgar scandal sometimes assailed him,—he had high thoughts to console him, such as were never before imparted to mortal. This was probably written in some period of dejection, when his heart was ill at ease, and he looked upon the world with a slight tinge of indifference, if not of dislike. Every man of high genius has felt something of this. It was reserved for the highest to throw it off, “like dewdrops from the lion's mane.” But the profound self-abasement and despondency of the 74th Sonnet, exquisite as the diction is, appear to us unreal, as a representation of the mental state of William Shakspeare; written, as it most probably was, at a period of his life when he revels and luxuriates (in the comedies which belong to the close of the sixteenth century) in the spirit of enjoyment, gushing from a heart full of love for his species, at peace with itself and with all the world.

We have thus, if we have not been led away by imaginary associations, connected the verses addressed to

“the world's fresh ornament,
And only herald to the gaudy spring,”

in a poem, or poems, of fifty stanzas, written upon a plan by which it is obviously presented as a work of fiction, in which the poet displays his art in a style accordant with the existing fashion and the example of other poets. The theme is the personal beauty of a wonderful youth, and the strong affection of a poet. Beauty is to be perpetuated by marriage, and to be immortalized in the poet's verses. Beauty is gradually to fade before Time, but is to be still immortalized. Beauty is to yield to Death, as the poet himself yields, but its memory is to endure in “eternal lines.” Separating from this somewhat monotonous theme those portions of a hundred and fifty-four Sonnets which do not appear essentially to belong to it, we separate, as we believe, more or less, what has a personal interest in these compositions from what is meant to be dramatic—the real from the fictitious. Our theory, we well know, is liable to many objections; but it is based upon the unquestionable fact that these one hundred and fifty-four Sonnets cannot be received as a continuous poem upon any other principle than that the author had written them continuously. If there are some parts which are acknowledged interpolations, may there not be other parts that are open to the same belief? If there are parts entirely different in their tone from the bulk of these Sonnets, may we not consider that one portion was meant to be artificial and another real,—that the poet sometimes spoke in an assumed character, sometimes in a natural one? This theory we know could not hold if the poet had himself arranged the sequence of these verses; but as it is manifest that two stanzas have been introduced from a poem printed ten years earlier,—that others are acknowledged to be out of order, and others positively dragged in without the slightest connexion,—may we not carry the separation still further, and, believing that the “begetter”—the *getter-up*—of these Sonnets had levied contributions upon all Shakspeare's “private friends,”—assume that he was indifferent to any arrangement which might make each portion of the poem tell its own history? There is one decided advantage in the separation which we have proposed—the

idea with which the series opens, and which is carried, *here and there*, in the original, through the first hundred and twenty-six Sonnets, does not now over-ride the whole of the series. The separate parts may be read with more pleasure when they are relieved from this strained and exaggerated association.

There are three points connected with the opinion we have formed with regard to the entire series of Sonnets, which we must briefly notice before we leave the subject.

The first is, the inconsistencies which obviously present themselves in adopting the theory that the series of Sonnets—or at least the first hundred and twenty-six Sonnets—are addressed to *one* person. It is not our intention to discuss the question *to whom* they were addressed, which question depends upon the adoption of the theory that they are addressed *to one*. Drake's opinion that they were addressed to Lord Southampton rests upon the belief that Shakspeare looked up to some friend to whom they point, "with reverence and homage." The later theory, that William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, was their object, is supported by the facts, derived from Clarendon and others, that he was "a man of noble and gallant character, though always of a licentious life." W. H. is held to be William Herbert; and Mr. Hallam says, "Proofs of the low moral character of 'W. H.' are continual." We venture to think that the term "continual" is somewhat loosely applied. The one "sensual fault," of which the poet complains, is obscurely hinted at in the 33rd, 34th, 35th, 40th, 41st, and 42nd stanzas; and the general faults of his friend's character, from which the injury proceeded, are summed up in the 94th, 95th, and 96th. We shall search in vain throughout the hundred and fifty-four Sonnets for any similar indications of the "low moral character" of the person addressed. But the supposed continuity of the poem implies arrangement, and therefore consistency, in the author. In the 41st stanza the *one* friend, according to this theory, is reproached for the treachery which is involved in the in-

dulgence of his passions. The poet says, "thou might'st

"chide thy beauty and thy *straying youth*,
Who lead thee in *their riot* even there
Where thou art forc'd to break a two-fold
truth."

Again, in the 95th stanza we have these lines:—

"How sweet and lovely dost thou make *the shame*,
Which, like a canker in the fragrant rose,
Doth spot the beauty of thy *budding name*!"

And,

"O, what a mansion have those *vices* got,
Which for their habitation chose out thee!"

Here are not only secret "vices," but "shame," defacing the character. "Tongues" make "lascivious comments" on the story of his days. Is it to this person that in the 69th Sonnet we have these lines addressed?—

"Those parts of thee that the world's eye doth
view
Want nothing that the thought of hearts can
mend."

Is it to this person that the 70th Sonnet is devoted, in which are these remarkable words?—

"Thou present'st a *pure unstained prime*,
Thou hast pass'd by the *ambush of young days*,
Either not assail'd, or victor being charg'd."

These lines, be it remembered, occur *between* the first reproof for licentiousness in the 41st stanza, and the repetition of the blame in the 95th. Surely, if the poem is to be taken as continuous, and as addressed to *one* person, such contradictions would make us believe that the whole is based on unreality, and that the poet was satisfied to utter the wildest inconsistencies, merely to produce verses of exquisite beauty, but of "true no-meaning."

The second point to which we would briefly request attention is the supposed date of the series of Sonnets. The date must, it is evident, be settled in some measure according to the presiding belief in the person to whom they are held to be addressed. Mr. Hallam, who thinks the hypothesis of William Herbert sufficiently proved to demand our assent,

says, "Pembroke succeeded to his father in 1601: I incline to think that the Sonnets were written about that time, some probably earlier, some later." Pembroke was born in 1580. Now, in the earlier Sonnets, according to the hypothesis, he might be called "beauteous and lovely youth," or "sweet boy;" but Southampton could not be so addressed unless the earlier Sonnets were written even before the dedication of the 'Venus and Adonis' to him, in 1593, for Southampton was born in 1573. Further, it is said that, whilst the person addressed was one who stood "on the top of happy hours," the poet who addressed him was

"Beated and chopp'd with tann'd antiquity,"

as in the 62nd Sonnet;

"With Time's injurious hand crush'd and o'erworn,"

as in the 63rd; and approaching the termination of his career, as so exquisitely described in the 73rd:—

"That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the
cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds
sang.

In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love
more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere
long."

Most distinctly in this particular portion of the Sonnets the extreme youth of the person addressed is steadily kept in view. But some are written earlier, some later; time is going on. In the 104th Sonnet the poet says that three winters, three springs, and three summers have passed

"Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green."

But, carrying on the principle of continuity, we find that in the 138th Sonnet the poet's "days are past the best;" and he adds—

"And wherefore say not I that I am *old*?"

That Sonnet, we have here to repeat, was published in 'The Passionate Pilgrim' when the poet was thirty-five. But let us endeavour to find one more gleam of light amidst this obscurity. In one of the Sonnets in which the poet upbraids his friend with his licentiousness, the 94th, we have these lines:—

"The summer's flower is to the summer sweet,
Though to itself it only live and die;
But if that flower with base infection meet,
The basest weed outbraves his dignity:
For sweetest things turn sourest by their
deeds;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than
weeds."

The thought is here quite perfect, and the image of the last line is continued from the 11th and 12th, ending in a natural climax. But we have precisely the same line as the last in a play of Shakspeare's age—one, indeed, which has been attributed to himself, 'The Reign of King Edward III.' Let us transcribe the passage where it occurs, in the scene where Warwick exhorts his daughter to resist the dangerous addresses of the King:—

"That sin doth ten times aggravate itself
That is committed in a holy place:
An evil deed done by authority
Is sin and subornation: Deck an ape
In tissue, and the beauty of the robe
Adds but the greater scorn unto the beast.
A spacious field of reasons could I urge
Between his glory, daughter, and thy shame:
That, poison shows worst in a golden cup;
Dark night seems darker by the lightning
flash;
Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds;
And every glory that inclines to sin,
The shame is treble by the opposite."

We doubt, exceedingly, whether the author of the 94th Sonnet, where the image of the festering lilies is a portion of the thought which has preceded it, would have transplanted it from the play, where it stands alone as an apophthegm. It seems more probable that the author of the play would have borrowed a line from one of the "sugared sonnets amongst private friends." The extreme fastidiousness required in the composition of the Sonnet, according to the poetical notions of that day, would not have warranted the adaptation of a line from a drama "sundry

times played about the city of London," as the title-page tells us this was; but the play, without any injury to its poetical reputation (to which, indeed, in the matter of plays, little respect was paid), might take a line from the Sonnet. Our reasoning may be defective, but our impression of the matter is very strong. The play was *published* in 1596, after being "sundry times played" in different theatres. William Herbert must have begun his career of licentiousness unusually early, and have had time to make a friend and abuse his confidence before he was fifteen—if the line is *original* in the Sonnet.

The last point to which we shall very briefly draw the reader's attention, is the doubt which has been stated whether the hundred and fifty-four Sonnets published in 1609 were the same as Meres mentioned, in 1598, as amongst the compositions of Shakspeare, and familiar to his "private friends." Mr. Hallam thinks they are not the same, "both on account of the date, and from the peculiarly personal allusions they contain." One of the strongest of the personal allusions is contained in the 144th, originally printed in 'The Passionate Pilgrim.' Where could the printer of 'The Passionate Pilgrim' have obtained that Sonnet except from some one of Shakspeare's "private friends?" If he so obtained it, why might not the collector of the volume of 1609 have obtained others of a similar character from a similar source? Would such productions have been circulated at all if they had been held to contain "peculiarly personal allusions?" If these are not the Sonnets which circulated amongst Shakspeare's "private friends," where are those Sonnets? Would Meres have spoken of them as calling to mind the sweetness of Ovid if only those published in 'The Passionate Pilgrim' had existed, many of which were "Verses to Music," afterwards printed as such? Why should those Sonnets only have been printed which contain, or are supposed to contain, "peculiar personal allusions?" The title-page of the collection of 1609 is 'Shake-speare's Sonnets.' We can only reconcile these matters with our belief that in 1609 were printed, without the cognizance of the author, all the Sonnets which could be

found attributed to Shakspeare; that some of these formed a group of continuous poems; that some were detached; that no exact order could be preserved; and that accident has arranged them in the form in which they first were handed down to us.

If we have succeeded in producing satisfactory evidence that many of the Sonnets are not presented in a natural and proper order in the original edition,—if we have shown that there is occasionally not only a digression from the prevailing train of thought, by the introduction of an isolated Sonnet amongst a group, but a jarring and unmeaning interruption to that train of thought,—we have established a case that the original arrangement is no part of the poet's work, because that arrangement violates the principles of art, which Shakspeare clings to with such marvellous judgment in all his other productions. The inference, therefore, is that the author of the Sonnets did not sanction their publication—certainly did not superintend it. This, we think, may be proved by another course of argument. The edition of 1609, although, taken as a whole, not very inaccurate, is full of those typographical errors which invariably occur when a manuscript is put into the hands of a printer to deal with it as he pleases, without reference to the author, or to any competent editor, upon any doubtful points. Malone, in a note upon the 77th Sonnet, very truly says, "*This, their, and thy* are so often confounded in these Sonnets, that it is only by attending to the context that we can discover which was the author's word." He is speaking of the original edition. It is evident, therefore, that in the progress of the book through the press there was no one capable of deciphering the obscurity of the manuscript by a regard to the context. The manuscript, in all probability, was made up of a copy of copies; so that the printer even was not responsible for those errors which so clearly show the absence of a presiding mind in the conduct of the printing. Malone has suggested that these constantly recurring mistakes in the use of *this, their, thy, and thine*, probably originated in the words being

abbreviated in the manuscript, according to the custom of the time. But this species of mistake is by no means uniform. For example: from the 43rd to the 48th Sonnet these errors occur with remarkable frequency; in one Sonnet, the 46th, this species of mistake happens four times. But we read on, and presently find that we may trust to the printed copy, which does not now violate the context. What can we infer from this, but that the separate poems were printed from different manuscripts in which various systems of writing were employed,—some using abbreviations, some rejecting them? If the *one* poem, as the first hundred and twenty-six Sonnets are called, had been printed either from the author's manuscript, or from a uniform copy of the author's manuscript, such differences of systematic error in some places, and of systematic correctness in others, would have been very unlikely to have occurred. If the poem had been printed under the author's eye, their existence would have been impossible.

The theory that the first hundred and twenty-six Sonnets were a continuous poem, or poems, addressed to one person, and that a very young man—and that the greater portion of the remaining twenty-eight Sonnets had reference to a female, with whom there was an illicit attachment on the part of the poet and the young man—involves some higher difficulties, if it is assumed that the publication was authorized by the author, or by *the* person to whom they are held to be addressed. Could Shakspeare, in 1609, authorize or sanction their publication? He was then living at Stratford, in the enjoyment of wealth; he was forty-five years of age: he was naturally desirous to associate with himself all those circumstances which constitute respectability of character. If the Sonnets had regard to actual circumstances connected with his previous career, would he, a husband, a father of two daughters, have authorized a publication so calculated to degrade him in the eyes of his family and his associates, if the verses could bear the construction now put upon them? We think not. On the other hand, did the one person to whom they

are held to be addressed sanction their publication? Would Lord Pembroke have suffered himself to be styled "W. H., the only begetter of these ensuing Sonnets"—plain Mr. W. H.—he, a nobleman, with all the pride of birth and rank about him—and represented in these poems as a man of licentious habits, and treacherous in his licentiousness? The Earl of Pembroke, in 1609, had attained great honours in his political and learned relations. In the first year of James I. he was made a Knight of the Garter; in 1605, upon a visit of James to Oxford, he received the degree of Master of Arts; in 1607 he was appointed Governor of Portsmouth; and, more than all these honours, he was placed in the highest station by public opinion; he was, as Clarendon describes, "the most universally beloved and esteemed of any man of that age." Was this the man, in his mature years, distinctly to sanction a publication which it was understood recorded his profligacy? He was of "excellent parts, and a graceful speaker upon any subject, having a good proportion of learning, and a ready wit to apply to it," says Clarendon. Is there in the Sonnets the slightest allusion to the talents of the one person to whom they are held to be addressed? If, then, the publication was *not* authorized, in either of the modes assumed, we have no warrant whatever for having regard to the original order of the Sonnets, and in assuming a continuity *because* of that order. What then is the alternative? That the Sonnets were a collection of "Sibylline leaves" rescued from the perishableness of their written state by some person who had access to the high and brilliant circle in which Shakspeare was esteemed; and that this person's scrap-book, necessarily imperfect, and pretending to no order, found its way to the hands of a bookseller, who was too happy to give to that age what its most distinguished man had written at various periods, for his own amusement, and for the gratification of his "private friends."

We subjoin, for the more ready information of those who may be disposed to ex-

amine for themselves the question of the order of Shakspeare's Sonnets (and it really is a question of great interest and rational curiosity), the results of the two opposite theories—of their exhibiting almost perfect continuity, on the one hand; and of their being a mere collection of fragments, on the other. The one theory is illustrated with much ingenuity by Mr. Brown; the other was capriciously adopted by the editor of the collection of 1640.

MR. BROWN'S DIVISION INTO SIX POEMS.

First Poem.—Stanzas i. to xxvi. To his Friend, persuading him to marry.

Second Poem.—Stanzas xxvii. to lv. To his Friend, who had robbed him of his Mistress—forgiving him.

Third Poem.—Stanzas lvi. to lxxvii. To his Friend, complaining of his Coldness, and warning him of Life's Decay.

Fourth Poem.—Stanzas lxxviii. to ci. To his Friend, complaining that he prefers another Poet's Praises, and reproving him for faults that may injure his character.

Fifth Poem.—Stanzas cii. to cxxvi. To his Friend, excusing himself for having been sometimes silent, and disclaiming the charge of Inconstancy.

Sixth Poem.—Stanzas cxxvii. to clii. To his Mistress, on her Infidelity.

ARRANGEMENT OF THE EDITION OF 1640.

* * * In this arrangement the greater part of the Poems of 'The Passionate Pilgrim' are blended, and are here marked P. P. In this collection the following Sonnets are not found:—18, 19, 43, 56, 75, 76, 96, 126.

The Glory of Beauty. [67, 68, 69.]

Injurious Time. [60, 63, 64, 65, 66.]

True Admiration. [53, 54.]

The Force of Love. [57, 58.]

The Beauty of Nature. [59.]

Love's Cruelty. [1, 2, 3.]

Youthful Glory. [13, 14, 15.]

Good Admonition. [16, 17.]

Quick Prevention. [7.]

Magazine of Beauty. [4, 5, 6.]

An Invitation to Marriage. [8, 9, 10, 11, 12.]

False Belief. [138.]

A Temptation. [144.]

Fast and Loose. [P. P. 1.]

True Content. [21.]

A bashful Lover. [23.]

Strong Conceit. [22.]

A sweet Provocation. [P. P. 11.]

A constant Vow. [P. P. 3.]

The Exchange. [20.]

A Disconsolation. [27, 28, 29.]

Cruel Deceit. [P. P. 4.]

The Unconstant Lover. [P. P. 5.]

The Benefit of Friendship. [30, 31, 32.]

Friendly Concord. [P. P. 6.]

Inhumanity. [P. P. 7.]

A Congratulation. [38, 39, 40.]

Loss and Gain. [41, 42.]

Foolish Disdain. [P. P. 9.]

Ancient Antipathy. [P. P. 10.]

Beauty's Valuation. [P. P. 11.]

Melancholy Thoughts. [44, 45.]

Love's Loss. [P. P. 8.]

Love's Relief. [33, 34, 35.]

Unanimity. [36, 37.]

Loth to Depart. [P. P. 12, 13.]

A Masterpiece. [24.]

Happiness in Content. [25.]

A Dutiful Message. [26.]

Go and come quickly. [50, 51.]

Two Faithful Friends. [46, 47.]

Careless Neglect. [48.]

Stout Resolution. [49.]

A Duel. [P. P. 14.]

Love-sick. [P. P. 15.]

Love's Labour Lost. [P. P. 16.]

Wholesome Counsel. [P. P. 17.]

Sat fuisse. [62.]

A living Monument. [55.]

Familiarity breeds Contempt. [52.]

Patiens Armatus. [61.]

A Valediction. [71, 72, 74.]

Nil magnis Invidia. [70.]

Love-sick. [80, 81.]

The Picture of true Love. [116.]

In Praise of his Love. [82, 83, 84, 85.]

A Resignation. [86, 87.]

Sympathizing Love. [P. P. 18.]

A Request to his Scornful Love. [88, 89, 90, 91.]

A Lover's Affection, though his Love
 prove Unconstant. [92, 93, 94, 95.]
 Complaint for his Lover's Absence. [97,
 98, 99.]
 An Invocation to his Muse. [100, 101.]
 Constant Affection. [104, 105, 106.]
 Amazement. [102, 103.]
 A Lover's Excuse for his long Absence.
 [109, 110.]
 A Complaint. [111, 112.]
 Self-flattery of her Beauty. [113, 114,
 115.]
 A Trial of Love's Constancy. [117, 118,
 119.]
 A good Construction of his Love's Un-
 kindness. [120.]
 Error in Opinion. [121.]
 Upon the Receipt of a Table-Book from
 his Mistress. [122.]
 A Vow. [123.]
 Love's Safety. [124.]
 An Entreaty for her Acceptance. [125.]
 Upon her playing upon the Virginals.
 [128.]
 Immoderate Lust. [129.]
 In praise of her Beauty, though Black.
 [127, 130, 131, 132.]
 Unkind Abuse. [133, 134.]
 Love-suit. [135, 136.]
 His Heart wounded by her Eye. [137,
 139, 140.]
 A Protestation. [141, 142.]
 An Allusion. [143.]
 Life and Death. [145.]
 A Consideration of Death. [146.]
 Immoderate Passion. [147.]
 Love's powerful Subtilty [148, 149, 150.]
 Retaliation. [78, 79.]
 Sunset. [73, 77.]
 A Monument to Fame. [107, 108.]
 Perjury. [151, 152.]
 Cupid's Treachery. [153, 154.]

Of the estimation in which Shakspeare's
 'Sonnets' were held some half century ago,
 the greatest of our Sonnet writers, Words-
 worth, thus speaks :—

"There is extant a small volume of mis-
 cellaneous poems in which Shakspeare ex-
 presses his feelings in his own person. It is
 not difficult to conceive that the editor,
 George Steevens, should have been insensible
 to the beauties of one portion of that volume,
 the Sonnets; though there is not a part
 of the writings of this poet where is found,
 in an equal compass, a greater number of
 exquisite feelings felicitously expressed.
 But, from regard to the critic's own credit,
 he would not have ventured to talk of an
 act of parliament not being strong enough
 to compel the perusal of these, or any pro-
 duction of Shakspeare, if he had not known
 that the people of England were ignorant
 of the treasures contained in those little
 pieces."

That ignorance has been removed; and
 no one has contributed more to its removal,
 by creating a school of poetry founded upon
 Truth and Nature, than Wordsworth him-
 self. The critics of the last century have
 passed away :—

"Peor and Baälim
 Forsake their temples dim."

By the operation of what great sustaining
 principle is it that we have come back to
 the just appreciation of "the treasures con-
 tained in those little pieces"? The poet
 critic will answer :—

"There never has been a period, and per-
 haps never will be, in which vicious poetry,
 of some kind or other, has not excited more
 zealous admiration, and been far more
 generally read, than good; but this advan-
 tage attends the good, that the *individual*,
 as well as the species, survives from age to
 age: whereas, of the depraved, though the
 species be immortal, the individual quickly
perishes; the object of present admiration
 vanishes, being supplanted by some other as
 easily produced, which, though no better,
 brings with it at least the irritation of
 novelty,—with adaptation, more or less
 skilful, to the changing humours of the
 majority of those who are most at leisure to
 regard poetical works when they first solicit
 their attention. Is it the result of the whole,
 that, in the opinion of the writer, the judg-

ment of the people is not to be respected? The thought is most injurious; and, could the charge be brought against him, he would repel it with indignation. The people have already been justified, and their eulogium pronounced by implication, when it is said above—that, of *good* poetry, the *individual*, as well as the species, *survives*. And how does it survive but through the people? what preserves it but their intellect and their wisdom?—

‘Past and future are the wings
On whose support, harmoniously conjoin’d,
Moves the great spirit of human knowledge.’
—MS.

The voice that issues from this spirit is that *vox populi* which the Deity inspires. Foolish must he be who can mistake for this a local acclamation, or a transitory outcry—transitory, though it be for years; local, though from a nation! Still more lamentable is his error who can believe that there is anything of divine infallibility in the clamour of that small though loud portion of the community, ever governed by factitious influence, which, under the name of the PUBLIC, passes itself, upon the unthinking, for the PEOPLE.”

It is the perpetual mistake of the public for the people that has led to the belief that there was a period when Shakspeare was neglected. He was *always* in the heart of the people. There, in that deep rich soil, have the Sonnets rested during two centuries; and here and there in remote places have the seeds put forth leaves and flowers. All young imaginative minds now rejoice in their hues and their fragrance. But this preference of the fresh and beautiful of poetical life to the *pot-pourri* of the last age must be a regulated love. Those who, seeing the admiration which now prevails for these outpourings of “exquisite feelings felicitously expressed,” talk of the ‘Sonnets’ as equal, if not superior, to the greatest of the poet’s mighty dramas, compare things that admit of no comparison. Who would speak in the same breath of the gem of Cupid and Psyche, and of the Parthenon? In the ‘Sonnets,’ exquisite as they are, the poet goes not out of himself (at least in the *form* of the composition), and he walks, therefore, in a narrow circle of art. In the ‘Venus and Adonis,’ and the ‘Lucrece,’ the circle widens. But in the Dramas, the centre is the Human Soul, the circumference the Universe.

BOOK XI.

SHAKSPERE'S CRITICS.

CHAPTER I.

MILTON.—EDWARD PHILLIPS.

"SHAKSPERE was not so much esteemed, even during his life, as we commonly suppose; and after his retirement from the stage he was all but forgotten."* So we read in an authority too mighty to enter upon evidence. The oblivion after his retirement and death is the true *pendant* to the alleged neglect during his life†. When did the oblivion begin? It could scarcely have existed when, in 1623, an expensive folio volume of many hundred pages was published, without regard to the risk of such an undertaking—and it was a risk, indeed, if the author had been neglected and was forgotten. But the editors of the volume do not ask timidly for support of these neglected and forgotten works. They say to the reader, "Though you be a magistrate of wit, and sit on the stage at Blackfriars or the Cockpit, to arraign plays daily, know these plays have had their trial already, and stood out all appeals." Did the oblivion continue when, in 1632, a second edition of this large work was brought out? There was one man, certainly—a young and ardent scholar—who was not amongst the oblivious. JOHN MILTON was twenty-four years of age when these verses were published:—

"AN EPITAPH ON THE ADMIRABLE DRAMATIC
POET, W. SHAKESPEARE.

"What need my Shakespeare for his honour'd
bones
The labour of an age in piled stones,

* Life of Shakspeare, in 'Lardner's Cyclopædia.'

† See Book ix. chap. iv.

Or that his hallow'd relics should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,
What need'st thou such dull witness of thy
name?

Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a lasting monument.
For whilst to th' shame of slow endeavouring
art

Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book
Those Delphic lines with deep impression
took,

Then thou, our fancy of herself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much con-
ceiving,

And so sepulchred in such pomp doth lie,
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die."

The author of these lines could not have known the works of the "admirable dramatic poet," while that poet was in life; but sixteen years after his death he was the dear son of memory, the great heir of fame; his bones were honoured, his relics were hallowed, his works were a lasting monument, his book was priceless, his lines were oracular, Delphic. Is this oblivion? But it may be said that Milton was a young enthusiast, one who saw farther than the million; that the public opinion of a writer (and we are not talking of his positive excellence, apart from opinion) must be sought for in the voice of the people, or at any rate in that of the leaders of the people. How are we to arrive at the knowledge of this expression? We can only know, incidentally, that an

author was a favourite, either of a king or of a cobbler. We know that Shakspeare was the favourite of a king, in these times of his oblivion. A distinguished writer says, "The Prince of Wales had learned to appreciate Shakspeare, not originally from reading him, but from witnessing the court representations of his plays at Whitehall. Afterwards we know that he made Shakspeare his closet companion, for he was reproached with doing so by Milton."* The concluding words are founded upon a mistake of the passage in Milton. Charles is not *reproached* with reading Shakspeare. The great republican does not condemn the king for having made the dramatic poet the closet companion of his solitudes; but, speaking of the dramatic poet as a well-known author with whom the king was familiar, he cites out of him a passage to show that pious words might be found in the mouth of a tyrant. The passage not only proves the familiarity of Charles with Shakspeare, but evidences also Milton's familiarity; and, what is of more importance, the familiarity even of those stern and ascetic men to whom Milton was peculiarly addressing his opinions. The passage of the 'Iconoclastes' is as follows: "Andronicus Comnenus, the Byzantine emperor, though a most cruel tyrant, is reported by Nicetas to have been a constant reader of Saint Paul's epistles; and by continual study had so incorporated the phrase and style of that transcendant apostle into all his familiar letters, that the imitation seemed to vie with the original. Yet this availed not to deceive the people of that empire, who, notwithstanding his saint's vizard, tore him to pieces for his tyranny. From stories of this nature, both ancient and modern, which abound, the poets also, and some English, have been in this point so mindful of decorum as to put never more pious words in the mouth of any person than of a tyrant. I shall not instance an abstruse author, wherein the king might be less conversant, but one whom we well know was the closet companion of these his solitudes, William Shakespeare, who introduces the person of

* Mr. De Quincey's 'Life of Shakespeare' in the 'Encyclopædia Britannica.'

Richard the Third, speaking in as high a strain of piety and mortification as is uttered in any passage of this book*, and sometimes to the same sense and purpose with some words in this place: 'I intended,' saith he, 'not only to oblige my friends, but my enemies.' The like saith Richard, Act II., Scene I.—

'I do not know that Englishman alive
With whom my soul is any jot at odds,
More than the infant that is born to-night;
I thank my God for my humility.'

Other stuff of this sort may be read throughout the whole tragedy, wherein the poet used not much licence in departing from the truth of history, which delivers him a deep dissembler, not of his affections only but of religion." It was a traditionary blunder, which Warton received and transmitted to his successors, that Milton reproached Charles with reading Shakspeare, and thus inferred that Shakspeare was no proper closet companion. The passage has wholly the contrary tendency; and he who thinks otherwise may just as well think that the phrase "other stuff of this sort" is also used disparagingly.

A few years before—that is in 1645—Milton had offered another testimony to Shakspeare in his "L'Allegro," then published:—

"Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonson's learned sock be on,
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild."

Milton was not afraid to publish these lines, even after the suppression of the theatres by his own political party. That he went along with them in their extreme polemical opinions it is impossible to believe; but he would nevertheless be careful not to mention, in connexion with the stage, names of any doubtful eminence. He was not ashamed to say that the learning of Jonson, the nature of Shakspeare, had for him attractions, though the stage was proscribed. This contrast of the distinguishing qualities of the two men is held to be one amongst the many proofs of Shakspeare's want of learning; as if it was

* Milton here refers to the first section of the 'Eikon Basilike.'

not absolutely essential to the whole spirit and conception of the passage that the learning of Jonson, thus pointed out as his leading quality, should be contrasted with the higher quality of Shakspeare—that quality which was assigned him as the greatest praise by his immediate contemporaries—his nature. No one can doubt of Milton's affection for Shakspeare, and of his courage in avowing that affection, living as he was in the heat of party opinion which was hostile to all such excellence. We have simply "Jonson's learned sock;" but the "native wood-notes wild" of Shakspeare are associated with the most endearing expressions. He is "sweetest Shakespear," he is "Fancy's child." In his later years, after a life of contention and heavy responsibility, Milton still clung to his early delights. The 'Theatrum Poetarum,' which bears the name of his nephew Edward Phillips, is held to have received many touches from Milton's pen*. At any rate it is natural that it should represent Milton's opinions. It is not alone what is here said of Shakspeare, but of Shakspeare in comparison with the other great dramatic poets of his age, that is important. Take a few examples:—

"*Benjamin Jonson*, the most learned, judicious, and correct, generally so accounted, of our English comedians, and the more to be admired for being so, for that neither the height of natural parts, for he was no Shakspeare, nor the cost of extraordinary education, for he is reported but a bricklayer's son, but his own proper industry and addiction to books, advanced him to this perfection: in three of his comedies, namely, 'The Fox,' 'Alchymist,' and 'Silent Woman,' he may be compared, in the judgment of learned men, for decorum, language, and well humouring of the parts, as well with the chief of the ancient Greek and Latin comedians as the prime of modern Italians, who have been judged the best of Europe for a happy vein in comedies; nor is his 'Bartholomew Fair' much short of them; as for his other comedies, 'Cynthia's Revels,' 'Poetaster,' and the rest, let the name of

Ben Jonson protect them against whoever shall think fit to be severe in censure against them: the truth is, his tragedies 'Sejanus' and 'Catiline' seem to have in them more of an artificial and inflate than of a pathetic and naturally tragic height."

"*Christopher Marlowe*, a kind of second Shakespeare (whose contemporary he was), not only because like him he rose from an actor to be a maker of plays, though inferior both in fame and merit; but also because, in his begun poem of 'Hero and Leander,' he seems to have a resemblance of that clean and unsophisticated wit which is natural to that incomparable poet."

"*George Chapman*, a poetical writer, flourishing in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James, in that repute both for his translations of 'Homer' and 'Hesiod,' and what he wrote of his own proper genius, that he is thought not the meanest of English poets of that time, and particularly for his dramatic writings."

"*John Fletcher*, one of the happy triumvirate (the other two being Jonson and Shakespear) of the chief dramatic poets of our nation in the last foregoing age, among whom there might be said to be a symmetry of perfection, while each excelled in his peculiar way: Ben Jonson, in his elaborate pains and knowledge of authors; Shakespear, in his pure vein of wit, and natural poesy height; Fletcher, in a courtly elegance and genteel familiarity of style, and withal a wit and invention so overflowing, that the luxuriant branches thereof were frequently thought convenient to be lopped off by his almost incomparable companion Francis Beaumont."

"*William Shakespear*, the glory of the English stage; whose nativity at Stratford-upon-Avon is the highest honour that town can boast of: from an actor of tragedies and comedies, he became a maker; and such a maker, that, though some others may perhaps pretend to a more exact decorum and economy, especially in tragedy, never any expressed a more lofty and tragic height, never any represented nature more purely to the life; and where the polishments of art are most wanting, as probably his learning

* The 'Theatrum Poetarum' was published in 1675, the year after Milton's death.

was not extraordinary, he pleaseth with a certain wild and native elegance; and in all his writings hath an unvulgar style, as well in his 'Venus and Adonis,' his 'Rape of Lucrece,' and other various poems, as in his dramatics."

Half a century had elapsed, when these critical opinions were published, from the time when Ben Jonson had apostrophized Shakspeare as "soul of the age." Whatever qualification we may here find in the praise of Shakspeare, it is unquestionable that the critic sets him above all his contemporaries. Benjamin Jonson was "learned, judicious, and correct," but "he was no Shakspear." Marlowe was "a kind of a second Shakspear;" and his greatest praise is, that "he seems to have a resemblance of that clean and unsophisticated wit which is natural to that incomparable poet." Chapman is "not the meanest" of his time. Fletcher is "one of the happy triumvirate, the other two being Jonson and Shakespear;" but the peculiar excellence of each is discriminated in a way which leaves no doubt as to which the critic meant to hold superior. But there are no measured words applied to the character of Shakspeare. He is "the glory of the English stage"—"never any expressed a more lofty and tragic height, never any represented nature more purely to the life." We can understand what a pupil of Milton, bred up in his school of severe study and imitation of the ancients, meant, when he says, "Where the polishments of art are most wanting, as probably his learning was not extraordinary, he pleases with a certain wild and native elegance." Here is no accusation that the learning was wholly absent: and that this absence produced the common effects of want of cultivation. Shakspeare, "in all his writings, hath an *unvulgar* style." In the preface to this valuable little book—which preface is a composition eloquent enough to have been written by Milton himself—there is a passage which is worthy of special observation in connection with what we have already quoted: "If it were once brought to a strict scrutiny, who are the right, genuine, and true-born poets, I fear me our number would fall short, and

there are many that have a fame deservedly for what they have writ, even in poetry itself, who, if they came to the test, I question how well they would endure to hold open their eagle eyes against the sun: wit, ingenuity, and learning in verse, even elegance itself, though that comes nearest, are one thing, true native poetry is another; in which there is a certain air and spirit, which perhaps the most learned and judicious in other arts do not perfectly apprehend, much less is it attainable by any study or industry; nay, though all the laws of heroic poem, all the laws of tragedy were exactly observed, yet still this *tour entregent*, this poetic energy, if I may so call it, would be required to give life to all the rest, which shines through the roughest, most unpolished and antiquated language, and may haply be wanting in the most polite and reformed. Let us observe Spenser, with all his rusty obsolete words, with all his rough-hewn clouterly verses; yet take him throughout, and we shall find in him a graceful and poetic majesty: in like manner, Shakespear, in spite of all his unfiled expressions, his rambling and indigested fancies, the laughter of the critical, yet must be confessed a poet above many that go beyond him in literature some degrees." Taking the whole passage in connection, and looking also at the school of art in which the critic was bred, it is impossible to receive this opinion as regards Shakspeare in any other light than as one of enthusiastic admiration. It is important to note the period in which this admiration was publicly expressed. It was fifteen years after the Restoration of Charles II., when we had a new school of poetry and criticism in England; when the theatres were in a palmy state as far as regarded courtly and public encouragement. The natural association of these opinions with those of Milton's youth, has led us to leap over the interval which elapsed between the close of the Shakspearean drama and the rise of the French school. We desired to show the continuity of opinion in Milton, and in Milton's disciples, that had prevailed for forty years; during a large portion of which civil war and polemical strife had well nigh

banished poetry and the sister arts from England; and dramatic poetry, especially, was proscribed by a blind fanaticism, wholly and irredeemably, without discrimination between its elevating and its debasing influence upon the public morals. Milton himself had left "a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes." Let us retrace our steps, and glance a little at the prelude to this period.

In 1633 was published the celebrated 'Histrio-Mastix, the Player's Scourge,' of William Prynne. In the epistle dedicatory to the benchers of Lincoln's Inn, he says, that about seven years before he had set down all the play-condemning passages which he recollected in the Fathers and other authors, and that he had since enlarged the intended bulk of this discourse, "because I saw the numbers of players, play-books, play-haunters, and play-houses still increasing, there being above forty thousand play-books printed within these two years, as stationers inform me." In his address to the Christian reader he has a distinct allusion to the popularity of Shakspeare's collected works: "Some play-books since I first undertook this subject are grown from quarto into folio, which yet bear so good a price and sale, that I cannot but with grief relate it, they are now new printed in far better paper than most octavo or quarto bibles, which hardly find such vent as they." The two folio editions of Shakspeare are the only play-books grown from quarto to folio to which the zealous puritan can allude, with the exception of Jonson's own edition of his plays, completed in 1631; those of Beaumont and Fletcher were not collected till 1647. The very fact of the publication of the first two folios of Shakspeare is a proof of his popularity with general readers. They were not exclusively the studies of the scholar, such as Milton, or of the play-haunters whom Prynne denounces. A letter in the Bodleian Library, written by a Dr. James, about this period, testifies how generally they were read: "A young gentle lady of your acquaintance, having read the

works of Shakspeare, made me this question," &c.* When the London theatres were provided with novelties in such abundance that, according to Prynne, "one study was scarce able to hold the new play-books," the plays of Shakspeare were still in such demand for the purposes of the stage, that his successors in the theatrical property of the Globe and Blackfriars found it their interest to preserve the monopoly of their performance (which they had so long enjoyed), by a handsome gratuity to the Master of the Revels. There is this entry in the office-book of Sir Henry Herbert, in 1627: "Received from Mr. Heming, in their company's name, to forbid the playing of Shakespeare's plays to the Red Bull Company, five pounds." The people clearly had not yet forgotten the "delight and wonder of the stage." Fletcher, Massinger, Shirley, were newer favourites; but the people could not forget Shakspeare. Neither was he forgotten by the great. In the very year of the publication of Prynne's book—when St. James's and Whitehall were brilliant with the splendid revelries of an elegant court, and the queen herself took part in the masques and pageantries,—the indecent allusion to which cost Prynne his ears—the name of Shakspeare was as familiar to the royal circle as in the days of James. From the seventeenth of November to the sixth of January, there were eight performances at St. James's and Whitehall, three of which were plays of Shakspeare: namely, Richard III., Taming of the Shrew, and Cymbeline; and Sir Henry Herbert records of the last, "well liked by the king."† These office accounts have great *lacunæ*; but, wherever we find them during the reign of Charles, there we find a record of the admiration of Shakspeare.

Dryden lived near enough to the times of Charles I. to be good evidence as to the judgment which the higher circles formed of Shakspeare; after the Restoration he was intimate with men who had moved in those circles. His 'Essay on Dramatic Poesy,' which was first printed in 1668, contains the

* See Mr. Halliwell's 'Character of Falstaff,' p. 19.

† See Malone's 'Historical Account of the English Stage.'

following passage, which has been often cited. Dryden is speaking in his own person, in an imaginary conversation in which the Earl of Dorset bears a part: "To begin, then, with Shakspeare. He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid, his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him; no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of the poets,

'Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.'

The consideration of this made Mr. Hales of Eton say, that there was 'no subject of which any poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in Shakspeare;' and, however others are now generally preferred before him, yet the age wherein he lived, which had contemporaries with him, Fletcher and Jonson, never equalled them to him in their esteem: and in the last king's court, when Ben's reputation was at highest, Sir John Suckling, and with him the greater part of the courtiers, set our Shakspeare far above him." No testimony can be more positive than this, that the two greatest contemporaries of Shakspeare never equalled him in the public estimation during his own time; and that in the succeeding period of Charles I., when the reputation of Jonson was at the highest, Suckling, one of the wittiest and sprightliest of men, and the greater part of the courtiers, set Shakspeare far above him. But it was not the gay alone, according to Dryden, who thus re-

verenced Shakspeare. He tells us what was the opinion of "Mr. Hales of Eton." John Hales, a Fellow of Eton, is known as the "learned" Hales, and the "ever-memorable" Hales; and of him, Aubrey says, "When the court was at Windsor the learned courtiers much delighted in his company." His opinion of Shakspeare is given with more particularity by Gildon, in an Essay addressed to Dryden in 1694, in which he appeals to Dryden himself as the relator of the anecdote. It is not because Gildon is satirized in 'The Dunciad' that his veracity is to be questioned*:—"But to give the world some satisfaction that Shakspeare has had as great veneration paid his excellence by men of unquestioned parts as this I now express for him, I shall give some account of what I have heard from your mouth, Sir, about the noble triumph he gained over all the ancients, by the judgment of the ablest critics of that time. The matter of fact, if my memory fail me not, was this. Mr. Hales of Eton affirmed, that he would show all the poets of antiquity outdone by Shakspeare, in all the topics and common places made use of in poetry. The enemies of Shakspeare would by no means yield him so much excellence; so that it came to a resolution of a trial of skill upon that subject. The place agreed on for the dispute was Mr. Hales's chamber at Eton. A great many books were sent down by the enemies of this poet; and on the appointed day my Lord Falkland, Sir John Suckling, and all the persons of quality that had wit and learning, and interested themselves in the quarrel, met there; and upon a thorough disquisition of the point, the judges chosen by agreement out of this learned and ingenious assembly, unanimously gave the preference to Shakspeare, and the Greek and Roman poets were adjudged to veil at least their glory in that to the English hero."

From the death of Shakspeare to the shutting up of the theatres in 1642, a period is embraced of twenty-six years. We have seen the prodigious activity in the production of novelties which existed ten years before the suppression of the theatres. There is

* See Gifford's 'Memoirs of Jonson,' p. cclx.

too much reason to know that the stage had acquired a more licentious tone after Shakspeare's time; and although the puritans were over-zealous in their indiscriminating violence against all theatrical performances, there is just cause to believe that the senses of the people were stimulated by excitements of plot and character, mingled with profane and licentious language, much more than in the days when Shakspeare rested for his attractions on a large exhibition of natural passion and true wit; and when he produced play after play, history, comedy, tragedy—"works truly excellent and capable of enlarging the understanding, warming and purifying the heart, and placing in the centre of the whole being the germs of noble and manlike actions."* The nation was much divided then, as it was long afterwards, between the followers of extreme opinions in morals—the over-strict on one hand, the wholly careless on the other. Prynne tells us that, upon his first arrival in London, he had "heard and seen in four several plays, to which the pressing importunity of some ill acquaintance drew me while I was yet a novice, such wickedness, such lewdness, as then made my penitent heart to loathe, my conscience to abhor, all stage-plays ever since." Prynne left Oxford and came to London after 1620. Fletcher was then the living idol of the theatre; and any one who is acquainted with his plays, full of genius as they are, must admit that Prynne had too much cause for his disgust. In the office-book of Sir Henry Herbert, in 1633, we find the following curious entry: "The comedy called 'The Young Admiral,' being free from oaths, profaneness, or obscenity, hath given me much delight and satisfaction in the reading, and may serve for a pattern to other poets." The play was Shirley's. But six months after there is a still more curious entry in the same book: "This morning, being the 9th of January, 1633 [1634], the king was pleased to call me into his withdrawing chamber to the window, where he went over all that I had crossed in Davenant's play-book, and, allowing of *faith* and *slight* to be asseverations only and no oaths, marked

* Coleridge.

them to stand, and some other few things, but in the greater part allowed of my re-formations. This was done upon a complaint of Mr. Endymion Porter's, in December. The king is pleased to take *faith*, *death*, *slight*, for asseverations, and no oaths, to which I do humbly submit as my master's judgment; but under favour conceive them to be oaths, and enter them here, to declare my opinion and submission." But it was not the striking out of the asseveration, or even of the oaths, which could purify the plays of that period. Their principal demoralizing power consisted in their false representations of human character and actions. Take for example "the frightful contrasts," as they have justly been called, between the women of Beaumont and Fletcher and those of Shakspeare. *He* kept at all times in the high road of life. He "has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice; he never renders that amiable which religion and reason alike teach us to detest, or clothes impurity in the garb of virtue, like Beaumont and Fletcher, the Kotzebues of the day."* But this very truth and purity of Shakspeare must have greatly diminished his attractions, amidst a crowd who wrote upon opposite principles. Nothing but the unequalled strength of his artistical power could have preserved the unbroken continuance of his supremacy.

And this leads us to the consideration of another cause why the popular admiration of him would have been diminished and interrupted within a very few years after his death, and certainly long before the suppression of the theatres, if his excellences had not so completely triumphed over every impediment to his enduring popular fame. His plays were to a certain extent mixed up with the reputation of the actors by whom they were originally represented. In that curious play 'The Return from Parnassus,' which was acted by the students in St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1606, and which was clearly written by an academical person inclined to satirize the popular poets and players of his day, Kempe is thus made to address two scholars who want lessons in the histrionic art: "Be merry, my lads;

* Coleridge's 'Literary Remains,' vol. ii. p. 79.

you have happened upon the most excellent vocation in the world for money; they come north and south to bring it to our playhouse; and for honours, who of more report than Dick Burbage and Will Kempe? He is not counted a gentleman that knows not Dick Burbage and Will Kempe: there's not a country wench that can dance Sellenger's Round, but can talk of Dick Burbage and Will Kempe." Here we have a testimony to the wide-spread popularity of two of the original representatives of Shakspeare's clowns and heroes. Kempe died before Shakspeare; Burbage within three years after him. Burbage is almost identified with some of Shakspeare's greatest characters, and especially with Richard III.; and yet the attraction of the great tragic plays died not with Burbage. Before the suppression of the theatres this actor had his immediate successors; and during the eighteen years in which the theatres were closed, the original hits and points of the Richards, and Hamlets, and Macbeths, and Lears, were diligently recorded; and immediately after the Restoration actors again arose, ambitious to realize the mighty conceptions of the great master of the dramatic art. During the period when the theatres were shut, the readers of plays would still be numerous, and they probably would be most found among the younger men who had a vivid recollection of the representations of the successors of Shakspeare. We can understand what the later taste was, by the mode in which Shirley, in his preface to the collated edition of Beaumont and Fletcher, in 1647, speaks of these writers:—"Whom but to mention is to throw a cloud upon all former names, and benight posterity; this book being, without flattery, the greatest monument of the scene that time and humanity have produced, and must live, not only the crown and sole reputation of our

own, but the stain of all other nations and languages; for it may be boldly averred, not one indiscretion hath branded this paper in all the lines, this being the authentic wit that made Blackfriars an academy, where the three hours' spectacle, while Beaumont and Fletcher were presented, was usually of more advantage to the hopeful young heir, than a costly, dangerous, foreign travel, with the assistance of a governing monsieur or signor to boot; and it cannot be denied but that the young spirits of the time, whose birth and quality made them impatient of the sourer ways of education, have, from the attentive hearing these pieces, got ground in point of wit and carriage of the most severely employed students, while these recreations were digested into rules, and the very pleasure did edify. How many passable discoursing dining wits stand yet in good credit, upon the bare stock of two or three of these single scenes!" This is a low estimate of the power and capacity of the drama; and one which is a sufficient evidence of a declining taste amongst those who were perforce contented with reading plays during the silence of the stage. From "the greatest monument of the scene that time and humanity have produced," was to be learned what was of more advantage "than a costly, dangerous, foreign travel." Hence were to be acquired "wit and carriage," and "dining wits stand yet in good credit" by passing off the repartees of these dramatists as their own. Shirley knew the character of those whom he addressed in this preface. In the contentions of that tragical age few of the serious thinkers would open a play-book at all. To the gay cavaliers, Beaumont and Fletcher would perhaps be more welcome than Shakspeare; and Shirley tells us the grounds upon which they were to be admired. But assuredly this is not oblivion of *Shakspeare*.

CHAPTER II.

CIBBER.—DRYDEN.—RYMER.—GILDON.—DENNIS.—ADDISON.

THE theatres were thrown open at the Restoration. Malone, in his 'Historical Account of the English Stage,' informs us, that, "in the latter end of the year 1659, some months before the restoration of King Charles II., the theatres, which had been suppressed during the usurpation, began to revive, and several plays were performed at the Red Bull in St. John's Street, in that and the following years, before the return of the King." He then adds, that in June, 1660, three companies seem to have been formed, including that of the Red Bull; and he enters into a history of the contests between the Master of the Revels, and Killigrew and Davenant, who had received a patent from the king for the exclusive performance of dramatic entertainments. It is scarcely necessary for us to pursue the details of this contest, which, as is well known, terminated in the permanent establishment of two theatres only in London. Malone has ransacked the very irregular series of papers connected with the office of Sir Henry Herbert, who appears to have kept an eye upon theatrical performances with a view to demanding his fees if he should be supported by the higher powers. From these, and other sources, such as the List of Downes, the prompter of the principal plays acted by Killigrew's company, Malone infers, that "such was the lamentable taste of those times that the plays of Fletcher, Jonson, and Shirley were much oftener exhibited than those of Shakspeare." The plays acted by this company, as he collects from these documents, were 'Henry IV.,' 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' 'Othello,' and 'Julius Cæsar.' At Davenant's theatre, which boasted of the great actor Betterton, we learn, from Malone, that the plays performed were 'Pericles,' 'Macbeth,' 'The Tempest,' 'Lear,' 'Hamlet,' 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'Henry VIII.,' 'Twelfth Night,' 'Taming of the Shrew,' 'Henry V.' Malone does not do justice to the value

of his own documents, for, when he gives us one list, he points out that there are only three plays of Shakspeare—"a melancholy proof" of his decline; and at another list he shakes his head, reciting "the following plays of Shakspeare, and these *only*." Now it appears to us that, if any proof were wanting of the wonderful hold which Shakspeare had taken of the English mind, under circumstances the most adverse to his continued popularity, it would be found in these imperfect lists, which do not extend over more than eight or nine years. Here are absolutely fourteen plays of Shakspeare revived—for that is the phrase—in an age which was prolific of its own authors, adapting themselves to a new school of courtly taste. All the indirect testimony, however meagre, exhibits the enduring popularity of Shakspeare. Killigrew's new theatre in Drury Lane is opened with Henry IV. Within a few months after the Restoration, when heading and hanging are going forward, Pepys relates that he went to see 'Othello.' In 1661, he is attracted by 'Romeo and Juliet;' and, in 1662, we have an entry in his diary, with his famous criticism: "To the King's Theatre, where we saw 'Midsummer's Night's Dream,' which I had never seen before, nor shall ever again, for it is the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life." Here, upon unquestionable authority, we have a fifteenth play added to the fourteen previously cited. But why need we search amongst such chance entries for evidence of the reputation of Shakspeare immediately after the Restoration? Those who talk of Shakspeare as *emerging* some century ago into celebrity after having fallen into neglect for a lengthened period; those who flippantly affirm, that "the preface of Pope was the first thing that procured general admiration for his works," are singularly ignorant of the commonest passages of literary history. To the vague and random assertions and assumptions, whether old or new, about the

neglect into which Shakspeare had fallen as a popular dramatist, may be opposed the most distinct testimony of one, especially, who was a most accurate and minute chronicler of the public taste. COLLEY CIBBER, who himself became an actor, in 1690, in the one privileged company of London, of which Betterton was the head—a company formed out of the united strength of the two companies which had been established at the Restoration—describes the state of the stage at the period of the first revival of dramatic performances: “Besides their being thorough masters of their art, these actors set forward with two critical advantages, which perhaps may never happen again in many ages.” One of the advantages he mentions, but a secondary one, was, “that before the Restoration no actresses had ever been seen upon the English stage.” But the chief advantage was, “their immediate opening after the so long interdiction of plays during the civil war and the anarchy that followed it.” He then goes on to say, “What eager appetites from so long a fast must the guests of those times have had to that high and fresh variety of entertainments!” Provided by whom? By the combined *variety* of Jonson, and Fletcher, and Massinger, and Ford, and Shirley, and a host of other writers, whose attractive fare was to be presented to the eager guests after so long a fast? No. The high entertainment and the fresh variety was to be provided by one man alone,—the man who we are told was neglected in his own age, and forgotten in that which came after him. “What eager appetites from so long a fast must the guests of those times have had to that high and fresh variety of entertainments *which Shakespeare had left prepared for them! Never was a stage so provided.* A hundred years are wasted, and another silent century well advanced*, and yet what unborn age shall say Shakespeare has his equal! How many shining actors have the warm scenes of his genius given to posterity!” Betterton is idolized as an actor, as much as the old man venerates Shakspeare: “Betterton was an actor, as Shakespeare was an author, both without

competitors; formed for the mutual assistance and illustration of each other's genius. How Shakespeare wrote, all men who have a taste for nature may read, and know; but with what higher rapture would he still be read, could they conceive how Betterton played him!” Whenever Cibber speaks of Betterton's wondrous excellence, it is always in connection with Shakspeare: “Should I tell you that all the Othellos, Hamlets, Hotspurs, Macbeths, and Brutuses whom you may have seen since his time, have fallen far short of him, this still should give you no idea of his particular excellence.” For some years after the Restoration it seems to have been difficult to satiate the people with the repetition of Shakspeare's great characters and leading plays, in company with some of the plays of Jonson and Fletcher. The two companies had an agreement as to their performances: “All the capital plays of Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Ben Jonson were divided between them by the approbation of the court, and their own alternate choice. So that, when Hart was famous for Othello, Betterton had no less a reputation for Hamlet.” Still, the test of histrionic excellence was Shakspeare. So far from Shakspeare being neglected at this period, it is almost evident that the performance of him was overdone; for every one knows that a theatrical audience, even in the largest city, is, in a considerable degree, composed of regular frequenters of the theatre, and that novelty is therefore an indispensable requisite to continued success. The plays of Shakspeare were better acted by the company of which Betterton was the head, than by the rival company; and this, according to Cibber, led to the introduction of a new taste:—“These two excellent companies were both prosperous for some few years, till their variety of plays began to be exhausted. Then, of course, the better actors (which the King's seem to have been allowed) could not fail of drawing the greater audiences. Sir William Davenant, therefore, master of the Duke's company, to make head against their success, was forced to add spectacle and music to action, and to introduce a new species of plays, since called dramatic operas, of which kind were ‘The

* Cibber is writing as late as 1740.

Tempest,' 'Psyche,' 'Circe,' and others, all set off with the most expensive decorations of scenes and habits, with the best voices and dancers.

"This sensual supply of sight and sound coming into the assistance of the weaker party, it was no wonder they should grow too hard for sense and simple nature, when it is considered how many more people there are that can see and hear than think and judge. So wanton a change of the public taste, therefore, began to fall as heavy upon the King's company as their greater excellence in action had before fallen upon their competitors. Of which encroachment upon wit several good prologues in those days frequently complained."

There can be no doubt that most of the original performances of Shakspeare, immediately after the Restoration, were given from his unsophisticated text. The first improvements that were perpetrated upon this text resulted from the cause which Cibber has so accurately described. Davenant, to make head against the success of the King's company "was forced to add spectacle and music to action." What importance Davenant attached to these novelties, we may learn from the description of the opening scene of 'The Enchanted Island;' that alteration of 'The Tempest,' by himself and Dryden, to which Cibber refers:—"The front of the stage is opened, and the band of twenty-four violins, with the harpsicals and theorbos which accompany the voices, are placed between the pit and the stage. While the overture is playing, the curtain rises, and discovers a new frontispiece joined to the great pilasters on each side of the stage. This frontispiece is a noble arch, supported by large wreathed columns of the Corinthian order; the wreathings of the columns are beautified with roses wound round them, and several Cupids flying about them. On the cornice, just over the capitals, sits on either side a figure, with a trumpet in one hand and a palm in the other, representing Fame. A little farther on the same cornice, on each side of a compass pediment, lie a lion and a unicorn, the supporters of the royal arms of England. In the middle of the arch are

several angels holding the King's arms, as if they were placing them in the midst of that compass-pediment. Behind this is the scene, which represents a thick cloudy sky, a very rocky coast, and a tempestuous sea in perpetual agitation. This tempest (supposed to be raised by magic) has many dreadful objects in it, as several spirits in horrid shapes flying down amongst the sailors, then rising in the air. And, when the ship is sinking, the whole house is darkened, and a shower of fire falls upon 'em. This is accompanied with lightning, and several claps of thunder, to the end of the storm."

In the alterations of this play, which were made in 1669, and which continued to possess the English stage for nearly a century and a half, it is impossible now not to feel how false was the taste upon which they were built. Dryden says of this play, that Davenant, to put the last hand to it, "designed the counterpart to Shakespeare's plot, namely, that of a man who had never seen a woman; that by this means those two characters of innocence and love might the more illustrate and commend each other." Nothing can be weaker and falser in art than this mere duplication of an idea. But still it was not done irreverently. The prologue to this altered Tempest (of his own part of which Dryden says, "I never writ anything with more delight") is of itself an answer to the asinine assertion that Dryden, in common with the public of his day, was indifferent to the memory of Shakspeare:—

"As, when a tree's cut down, the secret root
Lives underground, and thence new branches
shoot;
So, from old Shakespear's honour'd dust, this
day
Springs up and buds a new reviving play.
Shakespear, who (taught by none) did first
impart
To Fletcher wit, to labouring Jonson art.
He, monarch like, gave those his subjects
law,
And is that nature which they paint and
draw.
Fletcher reached that which on his heights
did grow,
Whilst Jonson crept and gather'd all below.

This did his love, and this his mirth digest :
 One imitates him most, the other best.
 If they have since out-writ all other men,
 'Tis with the drops which fell from Shake-
 speare's pen.

The storm which vanish'd on the neighb'ring
 shore
 Was taught by Shakespear's Tempest first to
 roar.

That innocence and beauty which did smile
 In Fletcher, grew on this Enchanted Isle.
 But Shakespear's magic could not copied be,
 Within that circle none durst walk but he.
 I must confess 'twas bold, nor would you
 now

That liberty to vulgar wits allow,
 Which works by magic supernatural things :
 But Shakespear's power is sacred as a king's.
 Those legends from old priesthood were re-
 ceiv'd,
 And he then writ, as people then believ'd.

Of DRYDEN's personal admiration of Shakspeare, of his profound veneration for Shakspeare, there is abundant proof. He belonged to the transition period of English poetry. His better judgment was sometimes held in subjection to the false taste that prevailed around him. He attempted to found a school of criticism, which should establish rules of art differing from those which produced the drama of Shakspeare, and yet not acknowledging the supremacy of the tame and formal school of the French tragedians. He did not perfectly understand the real nature of the romantic drama. He did not see that, as in all other high poetry, simplicity was one of its great elements. He was of those who would "gild refined gold." But for genial hearty admiration of the great master of the romantic drama no one ever went beyond him. Take, for example, the conclusion of his preface to 'All for Love :'
 —"In my style I have professed to imitate the divine Shakespear ; which that I might perform more freely, I have disencumbered myself from rhyme. Not that I condemn my former way, but that this is more proper to my present purpose. I hope I need not to explain myself that I have not copied my author servilely. Words and phrases must of necessity receive a change in succeeding

ages. But 'tis almost a miracle that much of his language remains so pure ; and that he who began dramatic poetry amongst us, untaught by any, and, as Ben Jonson tells us, without learning, should, by the force of his own genius, perform so much, that in a manner he has left no praise for any who came after him."

Dryden had the notion, in which Shaftesbury followed him, that the style of Shakspeare was obsolete, although we have just seen that he says, "'Tis almost a miracle that much of his language remains so pure." Yet with this notion, which he puts forward as an apology for tampering with Shakspeare, he never ceases to express his admiration of him ; and, what is of more importance, to show how general was the same feeling. The preface to 'Troilus and Cressida' thus begins :—"The poet Æschylus was held in the same veneration by the Athenians of after-ages as Shakspeare is by us." In this preface is introduced the 'Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy,' in which the critic applies a variety of tests to the art of Shakspeare, which only show that he did not understand the principles upon which Shakspeare worked : but still there is everywhere the most unqualified admiration ; and in the prologue to the altered play, which, being addressed to the people, could scarcely deal with such rules and exceptions for the formation of a judgment, we have again the most positive testimony to the public sense of Shakspeare. This prologue is "spoken by Mr. Betterton, representing the ghost of Shakspeare."

"See, my lov'd Britons, see your Shakespear
 rise,

An awful ghost confess'd to human eyes !
 Unnam'd, methinks, distinguish'd I had been
 From other shades, by this eternal green,
 Above whose wreaths the vulgar poets strive,
 And with a touch their wither'd bays re-
 vive.

Untaught, unpractis'd, in a barbarous age,
 I found not, but created first, the stage.
 And, if I drain'd no Greek or Latin store,
 'Twas, that my own abundance gave me
 more.

On foreign trade I needed not rely,
 Like fruitful Britain, rich without supply.

In this my rough-drawn play you shall behold

Some master-strokes, so manly and so bold,
That he, who meant to alter, found 'em such,
He shook; and thought it sacrilege to touch.

Now, where are the successors to my name?
What bring they to fill out a poet's fame?
Weak, short-liv'd issues of a feeble age;
Scarce living to be christen'd on the stage!"

With these repeated acknowledgments of Shakspeare's supremacy, it is at first difficult to understand how, in 1665, Dryden should have written, "others are now generally preferred before him." The age, as he himself tells us, differed in this respect from that of Shakspeare's own age, and also from that of Charles I. He says, in the same 'Essay on Dramatic Poesy,' speaking of Beaumont and Fletcher, "Their plays are now the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage, two of theirs being acted through the year for one of Shakespear's or Jonson's." But this is not neglect or oblivion of Shakspeare. We learn pretty clearly from Dryden, though he does not care to say so, for that would have been self-condemnation, that a licentiousness which was not found in Shakspeare was an agreeable thing to a licentious audience: "They" (Beaumont and Fletcher) "understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better, whose wild debaucheries, and quickness of wit in repartees, no poet before them could paint as they have done. . . . They represented all the passions very lively, but, above all, love." The highest things in Shakspeare can only be fitly appreciated by a people amongst whom there is a high moral tone, capable of understanding and of originating the highest poetical things. With all their faults, the ages of Elizabeth and James possessed this tone; and it is impossible now to estimate how greatly Shakspeare contributed to its preservation. But nine years after the Restoration there was no public principle in England, and little private honour. The keenest relish for Shakspeare most probably existed out of the Court; and Betterton, in all likelihood, felt the applause of the pit more truly valuable than that of the king's

box. One thing is perfectly clear: that, when Dryden is addressing the *people*, he speaks of Shakspeare as *their* especial favourite. He is then "*your* Shakspeare." The crafty and prosaic Pepys, on the contrary, no doubt expressed many a courtier's sentiment about Shakspeare. In the entry of his Diary of August 20th, 1666, we have, "To Deptford by water, reading 'Othello, Moor of Venice,' which I ever heretofore esteemed a mighty good play; but, having so lately read 'The Adventures of Five Hours,' it seems a mean thing." 'The Adventures of Five Hours,' a tragi-comedy, by Sir Samuel Tuke, was a translation from the Spanish, which Echard commends for its variety of plots and intrigues. We can easily understand how Pepys, and "my wife's maid," counted 'Othello' a mean thing in comparison with it. Pepys shows us pretty clearly the sort of audience that in that day was called fashionable, and the mode in which they displayed their interest in a theatrical entertainment:—"My wife and I to the King's playhouse, and there saw 'The Island Princess,' the first time I ever saw it; and it is a pretty good play, many good things being in it, and a good scene of a town on fire. We sat in an upper box, and the jade Nell came and sat in the next box; a bold, merry slut, who lay laughing there upon people." Again: "To the King's house to 'The Maid's Tragedy;' but vexed all the while with two talking ladies and Sir Charles Sedley; yet pleased to hear their discourse, he being a stranger." We can easily imagine that the "jade Nell," and the "talking ladies," were the representatives of a very large class, who preferred "other plays" to those of Shakspeare.

We select a few passages from 'The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy,' which contains a more condensed view of Dryden's opinions of Shakspeare than any other of his prefaces. It is the summary of the judgment of the highest critical authority of this period,—when the public taste had been corrupted with music and spectacle, and comedies of licentious intrigue abounded, in company with the rhyming tragedies of Dryden himself, and the ranting bombast of

his inferior rivals. This essay first appeared in 1679 :—

“How defective Shakespear and Fletcher have been in all their plots, Mr. Rymer has discovered in his ‘*Criticisms* :’ neither can we, who follow them, be excused from the same or greater errors ; which are the more unpardonable in us, because we want their beauty to countervail our faults.

“The difference between Shakespear and Fletcher, in their plotting, seems to be this—that Shakespear generally moves more terror, and Fletcher more compassion. For the first had a more masculine, a bolder, and more fiery genius ; the second, a more soft and womanish. In the mechanic beauties of the plot, which are the observation of the three unities—time, place, and action—they are both deficient ; but Shakespear most. Ben Jonson reformed those errors in his comedies, yet one of Shakespear’s was regular before him ; which is, ‘*The Merry Wives of Windsor*.’

“After the plot, which is the foundation of the play, the next thing to which we ought to apply our judgment is the manners ; for now the poet comes to work above ground. The groundwork indeed is that which is most necessary, as that upon which depends the firmness of the whole fabric ; yet it strikes not the eye so much as the beauties or imperfections of the manners, the thoughts, and the expressions.

“From the manners the characters of persons are derived ; for indeed the characters are no other than the inclinations, as they appear in the several persons of the poem. A character, or that which distinguishes one man from all others, cannot be supposed to consist of one particular virtue, or vice, or passion only ; but it is a composition of qualities which are not contrary to one another in the same person. Thus, the same man may be liberal and valiant, but not liberal and covetous ; so in a comical character, or humour, (which is an inclination to this or that particular folly,) Falstaff is a liar and a coward, a glutton and a buffoon, because all these qualities may agree in the same man ; yet it is still to be observed that one virtue, vice, and passion,

ought to be shown in every man, as predominant over all the rest ; as covetousness in Crassus, love of his country in Brutus ; and the same in characters which are feigned.

“The present French poets are generally accused, that, wheresoever they lay the scene, or in whatsoever age, the manners of their heroes are wholly French. Racine’s Bajazet is bred at Constantinople, but his civilities are conveyed to him by some secret passage from Versailles into the Seraglio. But our Shakespear, having ascribed to Henry the Fourth the character of a king and of a father, gives him the perfect manners of each relation, when either he transacts with his son or with his subjects. Fletcher, on the other side, gives neither to Arbaces, nor to his king in ‘*The Maid’s Tragedy*,’ the qualities which are suitable to a monarch. To return once more to Shakespear : no man ever drew so many characters, or generally distinguished them better from one another, excepting only Jonson. I will instance but in one, to show the copiousness of his invention ; it is that of Caliban, or the monster, in ‘*The Tempest*.’ He seems there to have created a person which was not in nature—a boldness which at first sight would appear intolerable ; for he makes him a species of himself, begotten by an incubus on a witch ; but this, as I have elsewhere proved, is not wholly beyond the bounds of credibility,—at least the vulgar still believe it. We have the separated notions of a spirit and of a witch—(and spirits, according to Plato, are vested with a subtle body ; according to some of his followers, have different sexes) ;—therefore, as from the distinct apprehensions of a horse and of a man, imagination has formed a Centaur, so from those of an incubus and a sorceress Shakespear has produced his monster. Whether or no his generation can be defended I leave to philosophy ; but of this I am certain, that the poet has most judiciously furnished him with a person, a language, and a character which will suit him, both by father’s and mother’s side : he has all the discontents and malice of a witch and of a devil, besides a convenient proportion of the deadly

sins—gluttony, sloth, and lust are manifest ; the dejectedness of a slave is likewise given him, and the ignorance of one bred up in a desert island. His person is monstrous, as he is the product of unnatural lust : and his language is as hobgoblin as his person : in all things he is distinguished from other mortals. The characters of Fletcher are poor and narrow in comparison of Shakespear's : I remember not one which is not borrowed from him, unless you will except that strange mixture of a man in the 'King and no King.' So that in this part Shakespear is generally worth our imitation ; and to imitate Fletcher is but to copy after him who was a copier.

"If Shakespear be allowed, as I think he must, to have made his characters distinct, it will easily be inferred that he understood the nature of the passions ; because it has been proved already that confused passions make undistinguishable characters. Yet I cannot deny that he has his failings ; but they are not so much in the passions themselves as in his manner of expression : he often obscures his meaning by his words, and sometimes makes it unintelligible. I will not say of so great a poet, that he distinguished not the blown puffy style from true sublimity, but I may venture to maintain that the fury of his fancy often transported him beyond the bounds of judgment, either in coining of new words and phrases, or racking words which were in use into the violence of a catachresis.

"To speak justly of this whole matter, it is neither height of thought that is discommended, nor pathetic vehemence, nor any nobleness of expression in its proper place ; but it is a false measure of all these, something which is like them and is not them : it is the Bristol stone which appears like a diamond ; it is an extravagant thought instead of a sublime one ; it is roaring madness instead of vehemence ; and a sound of words instead of sense. If Shakespear were stripped of all the bombast in his passions, and drest in the most vulgar words, we should find the beauties of his thoughts remaining ; if his embroideries were burnt down, there would still be silver at the bottom of the

melting-pot. But I fear (at least let me fear it for myself) that we who ape his sounding words have nothing of his thought, but are all outside ; there is not so much as a dwarf within our giant's clothes. Therefore let not Shakespear suffer for our sakes ; it is our fault, who succeed him in an age which is more refined, if we imitate him so ill that we copy his failings only, and make a virtue of that in our writings which in his was an imperfection.

"For what remains, the excellency of that poet was, as I have said, in the more manly passions ; Fletcher's in the softer : Shakespear writ better betwixt man and man, Fletcher betwixt man and woman ; consequently the one described friendship better, the other love ; yet Shakespear taught Fletcher to write love ; and Juliet and Desdemona are originals. It is true the scholar had the softer soul, but the master had the kinder. Friendship is both a virtue and a passion essentially : love is a passion only in its nature, and is not a virtue but by accident. Good nature makes friendship, but effeminacy love. Shakespear had an universal mind, which comprehended all characters and passions ; Fletcher a more confined and limited : for, though he treated love in perfection, yet honour, ambition, revenge, and generally all the stronger passions, he either touched not, or not masterly. To conclude all, he was a limb of Shakespear."

'The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy' is held by Dr. Johnson to be an answer to 'The Tragedies of the last Age considered and examined,' by the celebrated THOMAS RYMER. Rymer's book was originally published in 1678 ; and Dryden's Preface to 'Troilus and Cressida,' in which the supposed answer is contained, appeared in the following year. Rymer is generally known as the learned editor of the vast collection of national documents, arranged and published by him in his official capacity of Historiographer Royal, under the name of 'Fœdera.' But this publication was not commenced till 1703, and for many years previous he had been a miscellaneous writer in polite literature. In 1678, he produced a tragedy entitled 'Edgar.' It is almost painful to consider

that an author to whose gigantic labours all students of English history are so deeply indebted should have put forth the most ludicrous criticisms upon Shakspeare that exist in the English language. In 'The Tragedies considered,' he proposes to examine "the choicest and most applauded English tragedies of this last age; as 'Rollo,' 'A King and no King,' 'The Maid's Tragedy,' by Beaumont and Fletcher; 'Othello,' and 'Julius Cæsar,' by Shakespear; and 'Catiline,' by worthy Ben." But at this period he did not carry through his design. The whole of this book is devoted to the three plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. It would be beside our purpose to show how he disposes of them; but the following passage will exhibit the nature of his judgment:—"I have thought our poetry of the last age as rude as our architecture. One cause thereof might be, that Aristotle's 'Treatise of Poetry' has been so little studied amongst us." The completion of Rymer's plan was deferred for fifteen years. In 1693, appeared 'A Short View of Tragedy; its original Excellency and Corruption. With some Reflections on Shakespear, and other Practitioners for the Stage.' This second treatise thus begins: "What reformation may not we expect now that in France they see the necessity for a chorus to their tragedies! The chorus was the root and original, and is certainly almost the most necessary part, of tragedy." It would be exceedingly unjust to Rymer to collect the *disjecta membra* of his criticism upon, or rather abuse of, Shakspeare, without exhibiting what were his own notions of dramatic excellence; and certainly in the whole range of the ludicrous there are few things more amusing than his solemn scheme for a tragedy on the subject of the Spanish Armada, in imitation of 'The Persians,' of Æschylus. We cannot resist the temptation of presenting it to our readers:—

"The place, then, for the action may be at Madrid, by some tomb, or solemn place of resort; or, if we prefer a turn in it from good to bad fortune, then some drawing-room in the palace near the king's bed-chamber.

"The time to begin, twelve at night.

"The scene opening presents fifteen grandees of Spain, with their most solemn beards and accoutrements, met there (suppose) after some ball, or other public occasion. They talk of the state of affairs, the greatness of their power, the vastness of their dominions, and prospect to be infallibly, ere long, lords of all. With this prosperity and goodly thoughts transported, they at last form themselves into the chorus, and walk such measures, with music, as may become the gravity of such a chorus.

"Then enter two or three of the cabinet council, who now have leave to tell the secret that the preparations and the invincible Armada was to conquer England. These, with part of the chorus, may communicate all the particulars—the provisions, and the strength by sea and land; the certainty of success, the advantages by that accession; and the many tun of tar-barrels for the heretics. These topics may afford matter enough, with the chorus, for the second act.

"In the third act, these gentlemen of the cabinet cannot agree about sharing the preferments of England, and a mighty broil there is amongst them. One will not be content unless he is King of Man; another will be Duke of Lancaster. One, that had seen a coronation in England, will by all means be Duke of Aquitaine, or else Duke of Normandy. And on this occasion two competitors have a juster occasion to work up and show the muscles of their passion than Shakespear's Cassius and Brutus. After, the chorus.

"The fourth act may, instead of Atossa, present some old dames of the court, used to dream dreams, and to see sprites, in their night-rails and forehead-cloths, to alarm our gentlemen with new apprehensions, which make distraction and disorders sufficient to furnish out this act.

"In the last act the king enters, and wisely discourses against dreams and hobgoblins, to quiet their minds: and, the more to satisfy them, and take off their fright, he lets them to know that St. Loyola had appeared to him, and assured him that all is well. This said, comes a messenger of the ill news; his account is lame, suspected, he sent to prison.

A second messenger, that came away long after, but had a speedier passage: his account is distinct, and all their loss credited. So, in fine, one of the chorus concludes with that of Euripides, Thus you see the gods bring things to pass often otherwise than was by man proposed."

After this, can we wonder that the art of Thomas Rymer is opposed to the art of William Shakspeare? Let us hear what he says of Othello—"of all the tragedies acted on our English stage, that which is said to bear the bell away." He first gives the fable, of which the points are, the marriage of Othello, the jealousy from the incident of the handkerchief, and the murder of Desdemona. The facetious critic then proceeds:—

"Whatever rubs or difficulty may stick on the bark, the moral, sure, of this fable is very instructive.

"First, This may be a caution to all maidens of quality how, without their parents' consent, they run away with blackamoors.

"Secondly, This may be a warning to all good wives, that they look well to their linen.

"Thirdly, This may be a lesson to husbands, that, before their jealousy be tragical, the proofs may be mathematical."

The whole story of Othello, we learn, is founded upon "an improbable lie:—

"The character of that state (Venice) is to employ strangers in their wars; but shall a poet thence fancy that they will set a negro to be their general, or trust a Moor to defend them against the Turk? With us, a blackamoor might rise to be a trumpeter; but Shakspeare would not have him less than a lieutenant-general. With us, a Moor might marry some little drab, or small-coal wench: Shakspeare would provide him the daughter and heir of some great lord or privy-councillor; and all the town should reckon it a very suitable match: yet the English are not bred up with that hatred and aversion to the Moors as are the Venetians, who suffer by a perpetual hostility from them,—

Littora littoribus contraria

Nothing is more odious in nature than an improbable lie; and, certainly, never was

any play fraught, like this of Othello, with improbabilities."

We next are told, that "the characters of manners, which are the second part in a tragedy, are not less unnatural and improper than the fable was improbable and absurd." From such characters we are not to expect thoughts "that are either true, or fine, or noble;" and further, "in the neighing of a horse, or in the growling of a mastiff, there is a meaning, there is as lively expression, and, may I say, more humanity, than many times in the tragical flights of Shakspeare." The crowning glory of the treatise is the mode in which the critic disposes of the scene between Othello and Iago in the third act:—

"Then comes the wonderful scene where Iago, by shrugs, half-words, and ambiguous reflections, works Othello up to be jealous. One might think, after what we have seen, that there needs no great cunning, no great poetry and address, to make the Moor jealous. Such impatience, such a rout for a handsome young fellow, the very morning after her marriage, must make him either to be jealous, or to take her for a changeling below his jealousy. After this scene it might strain the poet's skill to reconcile the couple, and allay the jealousy. Iago now can only *actum agere*, and vex the audience with a nauseous repetition. Whence comes it, then, that this is the top scene—the scene that raises Othello above all other tragedies in our theatres? It is purely from the action, from the mops and the mows, the grimace, the grins and gesticulation. Such scenes as this have made all the world run after Harlequin and Scaramuccio."

The conclusion of this prodigious piece of criticism must conclude our extracts from Thomas Rymer:—

"What can remain with the audience to carry home with them from this sort of poetry, for their use and edification? How can it work unless (instead of settling the mind, and purging our passions) to delude our senses, disorder our thoughts, addle our brain, pervert our affections, hair our imaginations, corrupt our appetite, and fill our head with vanity, confusion, tintamarre, and jingle-

jangle beyond what all the parish-clerks of London, with their Old Testament farces and interludes, in Richard the Second's time, could ever pretend to? Our only hopes, for the good of their souls, can be, that these people go to the playhouse as they do to church, to sit still, look on one another, make no reflection, nor mind the play more than they would a sermon. There is in this play some burlesque, some humour and ramble of comical wit, some show, and some mimicry to divert the spectators: but the tragical part is plainly none other than a bloody farce, without salt or savour."

We cannot agree with the author of an able article in 'The Retrospective Review,' that "these attacks on Shakespear are very curious, as evincing how gradual has been the increase of his fame;" that "their whole tone shows that the author was not advancing what he thought the world would regard as paradoxical or strange;" that "he speaks as one with authority to decide." So far from receiving Rymer's frenzied denunciations as an expression of public opinion, we regard them as the idiosyncrasies of a very singular individual, who is furious in the exact proportion that the public opinion differs from his own. He attacks 'Othello' and 'Julius Cæsar,' especially, because Betterton had for years been drawing crowds to his performance in those tragedies. He is one of those who glory in opposing the general opinion. In his first book, he says, "With the remaining tragedies I shall also send you some reflections on that 'Paradise Lost' of Milton's, which some are pleased to call a poem." Dryden, the great critical authority of his day, before whose opinions all other men bowed, had in 1679 thus spoken of the origin of his great scene between Troilus and Hector: "The occasion of raising it was hinted to me by Mr. Betterton; the contrivance and working of it was my own. They who think to do me an injury by saying that it is an imitation of the scene betwixt Brutus and Cassius, do me an honour by supposing I could imitate the incomparable Shakespear." Dryden then goes on to contrast the modes in which Euripides, Fletcher, and Shakspeare have managed the quarrel of

two virtuous men, raised to the extremity of passion, and ending in the renewal of their friendship; and he says, "The particular groundwork which Shakespear has taken is incomparably the best." This decision of Dryden would in those days dispose of the matter as a question of criticism. But out comes Rymer, who, in opposition to Dryden's judgment, and Betterton's applause, tells us, that Brutus and Cassius here act the part of mimics; are bullies and buffoons; are to exhibit "a trial of skill in huffing and swaggering, like two drunken Hectors for a twopenny reckoning." It may be true that "the author was not advancing what *he thought* the world would regard as paradoxical and strange;" for it is the commonest of self-delusions, even to the delusions of insanity, to believe that the whole world agrees with the most extravagant mistakes and the strangest paradoxes; and when Rymer, upon his critical throne, "speaks as one with authority to decide," his authority is as powerless as that of the madman in Hogarth, who sits in solitary nakedness upon his straw, with crown on head and sceptre in hand. Rymer is a remarkable example of an able man, in his own province, meddling with that of which he has not the slightest true conception. He is, perhaps, more denuded of the poetical sense than any man who ever attempted to be a critic in poetry: but he had real learning. Shakspeare fell into worse hands after Rymer. The "Man Mountain" was fastened to the earth by the Lilliputians, and the strings are only just now broken by which he was bound.

In the quotations which we have given from Dryden, it may be seen how reverently criticism was based upon certain laws which, however false might be their application, were nevertheless held to be tests of the merit of the highest poetical productions. Dryden was always balancing between the rigid application of these laws, and his own hearty admiration of those whose art had rejected them. If he had been less of a real poet himself, he might have become as furious a stickler for the canons of the ancients as Rymer was. With all his occasional expressions of hatred towards the French school

of tragedy, he was unconsciously walking in the circle which the fashion of his age had drawn around all poetical invention. It was assuredly not yet the fashion of the people; for they clung to the school of poetry and passion with a love which no critical opinions could wholly subdue. It was not the fashion of those who had drunk their inspiration from the Elizabethan poets. It was not the fashion of Milton and his disciples. Hear how Edward Phillips speaks of Corneille in 1675:—"Corneille, the great dramatic writer of France, wonderfully applauded by the present age, both among his own countrymen and our Frenchly-affected English, for the amorous intrigues which, if not there before, he commonly thrusts into his tragedies and acted histories; the imitation whereof among us, and of the perpetual colloquy in rhyme, hath of late very much corrupted our English stage." It was the spread of this fashion amongst the courtly *littérateurs* of the day that gave some encouragement to the extravagance of Rymer. The solemn harangues about decorum in tragedy, the unities, moral fitness, did not always present the ludicrous side, as it did in this learned madman, who sublimated the whole affair into the most delicious absurdity. We love him for it. His application of a "rule" to Fletcher's 'Maid's Tragedy' is altogether such a beautiful exemplification of his mode of applying his critical knowledge, that we cannot forbear one more quotation from him:—"If I mistake not, in poetry, no woman is to kill a man, except her quality gives her the advantage above him; nor is a servant to kill the master, nor a private man, much less a subject, to kill a king; nor on the contrary. Poetical decency will not suffer death to be dealt to each other by such persons whom the laws of duel allow not to enter the lists together." Rymer never changes his opinions. The principles upon which he founded his first book were carried to a greater height of extravagance in his second. Dryden, on the contrary, depreciates Shakspeare, though timidly and doubtfully, in his early criticisms, but warms into higher and higher admiration as he grows older. The 'Defence of the Epilogue to the Conquest of Grenada,'

written in 1672, presents a curious contrast to 'The Grounds of Criticism.' He was then a young poet, and wanted to thrust aside those who stood in the way of his stage popularity: "Let any man who understands English, read diligently the works of Shakspeare and Fletcher; and I dare undertake that he will find in every page some solecism of speech, or some notorious flaw in sense: and yet these men are revered when we are not forgiven. . . . But the times were ignorant in which they lived. Poetry was then, if not in its infancy among us, at least not arrived to its vigour and maturity; witness the lameness of their plots." This was the self-complacency which the maturer thoughts of a vigorous mind corrected. But nothing could correct the critical obstinacy of Rymer. Dryden's poetical soul mounted above the growing feebleness of his age's criticism, till at last, when he attempted to deal with Shakspeare in the spirit of his age, he became a worshipper instead of a mocker:—

"Shakespeare, thy gift I place before my sight:
With awe, I ask his blessing ere I write.
With reverence look on his majestic face,
Proud to be less, but of his godlike race."*

The age laid its leaden sceptre upon the smaller minds, and especially upon those who approached Shakspeare with a cold and creeping admiration. Of such was CHARLES GILDON. In 1694 he appeared in the world with 'Some Reflections on Mr. Rymer's Short View of Tragedy, and an Attempt at a Vindication of Shakspeare.' It would be a waste of time to produce the antagonist of Rymer armed *cap-à-pie*, and set these two doughty combatants in mortal fight with their sacks of sand. It will be sufficient for us to quote a few passages from Gildon's 'Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage,' 1710, by way of showing, what indeed may be inferred from Rymer's own book, that the people were against the critics:—"Tis my opinion that, if Shakspeare had had those advantages of learning which the perfect knowledge of the ancients would have given him, so great a genius as his would have

* 'Epistle to Kneller.

made him a very dangerous rival in fame to the greatest poets of antiquity ; so far am I from seeing how this knowledge could either have curbed, confined, or spoiled the natural excellence of his writings. For, though I must always think our author a miracle for the age he lived in, yet I am obliged, in justice to reason and art, to confess that he does not come up to the ancients in all the beauties of the drama. But it is no small honour to him, that he has surpassed them in the topics or commonplaces. And to confirm the victory he obtained on that head at Mr. Hales's chamber, at Eton, I shall, in this present undertaking, not only transcribe the most shining, but refer the reader to the same subjects in the Latin authors. This I do that I might omit nothing that could do his memory that justice which he really deserves ; but to put his errors and his excellences on the same bottom is to injure the latter, and give the enemies of our poet an advantage against him, of doing the same ; that is, of rejecting his beauties, as all of a piece with his faults. This unaccountable bigotry of the town to the very errors of Shakespear was the occasion of Mr. Rymer's criticisms, and drove him as far into the contrary extreme. I am far from approving his manner of treating our poet ; though Mr. Dryden owns, that all, or most, of the faults he has found are just ; but adds this odd reflection : And yet, says he, who minds the critic, and who admires Shakespear less ? That was as much as to say, Mr. Rymer has indeed made good his charge, and yet the town admired his errors still : which I take to be a greater proof of the folly and abandoned taste of the town than of any imperfections in the critic ; which in my opinion, exposed the ignorance of the age he lived in ; to which Mr. Rowe very justly ascribes most of his faults. It must be owned that Mr. Rymer carried the matter too far, since no man that has the least relish of poetry can question his genius ; for, in spite of his known and visible errors, when I read Shakespear, even in some of his most irregular plays, I am surprised into a pleasure so great, that my judgment is no longer free to see the faults, though they are never so gross and

evident. There is such a witchery in him that all the rules of art which he does not observe, though built on an equally solid and infallible reason, vanish away in the transports of those that he does observe, so entirely as if I had never known anything of the matter." The rules of art ! It was the extraordinary folly of the age which produced these observations to believe that Shakspeare realized his great endeavours without any rule at all, that is, without any method. Rymer was such a thorough believer in the infallibility of these rules of art, that he shut his eyes to the very highest power of Shakspeare, because it did not agree with these rules. Gildon believed in the power, and believed in the rules at the same time : hence his contradictions. "The unaccountable bigotry of the town to the very errors of Shakespear" was the best proof of the triumphant privilege of genius to abide in full power and tranquillity amidst its own rules. The small poets, and the smaller critics, were working upon mechanic rules. When they saw in Shakspeare something like an adherence to ancient rules of art, they cried out, Wonderful power of nature ! When they detected a deviation, they exclaimed, Pitiableness of calamity of ignorance ! It is evident that these critics could not subject the people to their laws ; and they despise the ignorant people, therefore, as they pity the ignorant Shakspeare. Hear Gildon again :—"A judicious reader of our author will easily discover those defects that his beauties would make him wish had been corrected by a knowledge of the whole art of the drama. For it is evident that, by the force of his own judgment, or the strength of his imagination, he has followed the rules of art in all those particulars in which he pleases. I know that the rules of art have been sufficiently clamoured against by an ignorant and thoughtless sort of men of our age ; but it was because they knew nothing of them, and never considered that without some standard of excellence there could be no justice done to merit, to which poetasters and poets must else have an equal claim, which is the highest degree of barbarism. Nay, without an appeal to these very rules, Shakespear

himself is not to be distinguished from the most worthless pretenders, who have often met with an undeserved applause, and challenge the title of great poets from their success." We will only anticipate for a moment the philosophical wisdom of a later school of criticism, to supply an answer to Gildon: "The spirit of poetry, like all other living powers, must of necessity circumscribe itself by rules, were it only to unite power with beauty. It must embody in order to reveal itself; but a living body is of necessity an organized one; and what is organization but the connection of parts in and for a whole, so that each part is at once end and means?" *

The redoubted John DENNIS was another of the antagonists of Rymer. He carried heavier metal than Gildon; but he nevertheless belonged to the cuckoo school of "rules of art." He had a just appreciation of Shakspeare as far as he went; and a few of his judgments certainly here deserve a place:—"Shakespear was one of the greatest geniuses that the world ever saw for the tragic stage. Though he lay under greater disadvantages than any of his successors, yet had he greater and more genuine beauties than the best and greatest of them. And what makes the brightest glory of his character, those beauties were entirely his own, and owing to the force of his own nature; whereas his faults were owing to his education, and to the age that he lived in. One may say of him as they did of Homer—that he had none to imitate, and is himself inimitable. His imaginations were often as just as they were bold and strong. He had a natural discretion which never could have been taught him, and his judgment was strong and penetrating. He seems to have wanted nothing but time and leisure for thought, to have found out those rules of which he appears so ignorant. His characters are always drawn justly, exactly, graphically, except where he failed by not knowing history or the poetical art. He has for the most part more fairly distinguished them than any of his successors have done, who have falsified them, or confounded them, by

* Coleridge.

making love the predominant quality in all. He had so fine a talent for touching the passions, they are so lively in him, and so truly in nature, that they often touch us more without their due preparations than those of other tragic poets who have all the beauty of design and all the advantage of incidents. His master-passion was terror, which he has often moved so powerfully and so wonderfully, that we may justly conclude that, if he had had the advantage of art and learning, he would have surpassed the very best and strongest of the ancients. His paintings are often so beautiful and so lively, so graceful and so powerful, especially where he uses them in order to move terror, that there is nothing perhaps more accomplished in our English poetry. His sentiments, for the most part, in his best tragedies, are noble, generous, easy and natural, and adapted to the persons who use them. His expression is in many places good and pure after a hundred years; simple, though elevated—graceful, though bold—and easy, though strong. He seems to have been the very original of our English tragical harmony; that is, the harmony of blank verse, diversified often by dissyllable and trisyllable terminations. For that diversity distinguishes it from heroic harmony, and, bringing it nearer to common use, makes it more proper to gain attention, and more fit for action and dialogue. Such verse we make when we are writing prose; we make such verse in common conversation. If Shakespear had these great qualities by nature, what would he not have been if he had joined to so happy a genius learning and the poetical art!"

It was this eternal gabble about rules of art,—this blindness to the truth that the living power of Shakspeare had its own organization,—that set the metre-mongers of that day upon the task of improving Shakspeare. Dennis was himself one of the great improvers. Poetical justice was one of the rules for which they clamoured. Duncan and Banquo ought not to perish in 'Macbeth,' nor Desdemona in 'Othello,' nor Cordelia and her father in 'Lear,' nor Brutus in 'Julius Cæsar,' nor young Hamlet in 'Hamlet.' So

Dennis argues:—"The good and the bad perishing promiscuously in the best of Shakspeare's tragedies, there can be either none or very weak instruction in them." In this spirit Dennis himself sets to work to remodel 'Coriolanus':—"Not only Aufidius, but the Roman tribunes Sicinius and Brutus, appear to me to cry aloud for poetic vengeance; for they are guilty of two faults, neither of which ought to go unpunished." Dennis is not only a mender of Shakspeare's catastrophes, but he applies himself to make Shakspeare's verses all smooth and proper, according to the rules of art. One example will be sufficient. He was no common man who attempted to reduce the following lines to classical regularity:—

"Boy! False hound!
If you have writ your annals true, 'tis there,
That, like an eagle in a dovecote, I
Flutter'd your Volsces in Corioli.
Alone I did it—Boy!"

John Dennis has accomplished the feat:—

"This boy, that, like an eagle in a dovecote,
Flutter'd a thousand Volsces in Corioli,
And did it without second or acquittance,
Thus sends their mighty chief to mourn in
hell."

The alteration of 'The Tempest' by Davenant and Dryden was, as we have mentioned, an attempt to meet the taste of the town by music and spectacle. Shadwell went farther, and turned it into a regular opera; and an opera it remained even in Garrick's time, who tried his hand upon the same experiment. Dennis was a reformer both in comedy and tragedy. He metamorphosed 'The Merry Wives of Windsor' into 'The Comical Gallant,' and prefixed an essay to it on the degeneracy of the taste for poetry. Davenant changed 'Measure for Measure' into 'The Law against Lovers.' It is difficult to understand how a clever man and something of a poet should have set about his work after this fashion. This is Shakspeare's Isabella:—

"Could great men thunder
As Jove himself does, Jove would ne'er be
quiet,

For every pelting, petty officer
Would use his heaven for thunder: nothing
but thunder.
Merciful heaven!
Thou rather, with thy sharp and sulphurous
bolt,
Splitt'st the unwedgeable and gnarled oak,
Than the soft myrtle."

This is Davenant's:—

"If men could thunder
As great Jove does, Jove ne'er would quiet
be;
For every choleric petty officer,
Would use his magazine in heaven for
thunder:
We nothing should but thunder hear. Sweet
Heaven!
Thou rather with thy stiff and sulph'rous
bolt
Dost split the knotty and obdurate oak,
Than the soft myrtle."

'The Law against Lovers' was in principle one of the worst of these alterations; for it was a hash of two plays—of 'Measure for Measure,' and of 'Much Ado about Nothing.' This was indeed to destroy the organic life of the author. But it is one of the manifestations of the vitality of Shakspeare that, going about their alterations in the regular way, according to the rules of art, the most stupid and prosaic of his improvers have been unable to deprive the natural man of his vigour, even by their most violent depletions. His robustness was too great even for the poetical doctors to destroy it. Lord Lansdowne actually stripped the flesh off Shylock, but the anatomy walked about vigorously for sixty years, till Macklin put the muscles on again. Colley Cibber turned 'King John' into 'Papal Tyranny,' and the stage 'King John' was made to denounce the Pope and Guy Faux for a century, till Mr. Macready gave us back again the weak and crafty king in his original truth of character. Nahum Tate deposed the 'Richard II.' of Shakspeare wholly and irredeemably, turning him into 'The Sicilian Usurper.' How Cibber manufactured 'Richard III.' is known to all men. Durfey melted down 'Cymbeline' with no

slight portion of alloy. Tate remodelled 'Lear,'—and such a 'Lear!' Davenant mangled 'Macbeth;' but we can hardly quarrel with him for it, for he gave us the music of Locke in company with his own verses. It has been said, as a proof how little Shakspeare was once read, that Davenant's alteration is quoted in 'The Tatler' instead of the original. This is the reasoning of Steevens; but he has not the candour to tell us, that in 'The Tatler,' No. 111, there is a quotation from 'Hamlet,' with the following remarks:—"This admirable author, as well as the best and greatest men of all ages and of all nations, seems to have had his mind thoroughly seasoned with religion, as is evident by many passages in his plays, that would not be suffered by a modern audience." Steevens infers, that Steele, or ADDISON, was not a reader of Shakspeare, because 'Macbeth' is quoted from an acted edition; and that, therefore, Shakspeare was not read generally. If a hurried writer in a daily paper (as 'The Tatler' was) were to quote from some acted editions at the present day, he might fall into the same error; and yet he might be an ardent student of Shakspeare, in a nation of enthusiastic admirers. The early Essayists offer abundant testimonies, indeed, of their general admiration of the poet. In No. 68 of 'The Tatler,' he is "the great master who ever commands our tears." In No. 160 of 'The Spectator' Shakspeare is put amongst the first class of great geniuses, in company with Homer; and this paper contains a remarkable instance of a juster taste than one might expect from the author of 'Cato:'—"We are to consider that the rule of observing what the French call the *bienséance* in an allusion has been found out of later years, and in the colder regions of the world; where we could make some amends for our want of force and spirit, by a scrupulous nicety and exactness in our compositions."*

* Mr. De Quincey is certainly mistaken when he says, that "Addison has never in one instance quoted or made

In 'The Spectator,' 419, amongst the papers on 'The Pleasures of the Imagination,' Shakspeare's delineations of supernatural beings are thus mentioned:—"Among the English, Shakspeare has incomparably excelled all others. That noble extravagance of fancy, which he had in so great perfection, thoroughly qualified him to touch this weak superstitious part of his reader's imagination; and made him capable of succeeding where he had nothing to support him besides the strength of his own genius. There is something so wild, and yet so solemn, in the speeches of his ghosts, fairies, witches, and the like imaginary persons, that we cannot forbear thinking them natural, though we have no rule by which to judge of them; and must confess, if there are such beings in the world, it looks highly probable they should talk and act as he has represented them."

We have again an instance of Addison's good taste in his remarks upon the critical notions of poetical justice, which he calls "a ridiculous doctrine in modern criticism." Of the best plays which end unhappily he mentions 'Othello,' with others, and adds, "'King Lear' is an admirable tragedy of the same kind, as Shakspeare wrote it; but as it is reformed, according to the chimerical notion of poetical justice, in my humble opinion it has lost half its beauty." All this exhibits a better taste than we find in Gildon and Dennis; and it certainly is very remarkable that Addison, who in his own tragedy was laboriously correct, as it was called, should have taken no occasion to comment upon the irregularities of Shakspeare. Mr. De Quincey says of Addison, "The feeble constitution of the poetic faculty as existing in himself forbad him sympathising with Shakspeare." The feebleness of the poetic faculty makes the soundness of the judgment more conspicuous.

any reference to Shakspeare." No. 160 bears the signature of C., and immediately follows 'The Vision of Mirza,' bearing the same signature.

CHAPTER III.

ROWE.—POPE.—THEOBALD.—HANMER.—WARBURTON.

THE commencement of the eighteenth century produced the first of the critical editions of Shakspeare. In 1709 appeared 'Shakespeare's Plays Revised and Corrected, with an Account of his Life and Writings, by N. ROWE.' We should mention that the third edition of Shakspeare's Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies, in folio, appeared in 1664. It has been said that the greater number of the copies of this edition were destroyed in the fire of London; and a writer whom we must once more quote says, "During a whole century, only four editions of his complete works, and these small, were published; and there would only have been three, but for the destructive Fire of London in 1666."* The destruction by the fire is just as much proved as the smallness of the edition. One of our best bibliographers, Mr. Lowndes, whose 'Bibliographer's Manual' is a model of accuracy, doubts the statement of the destruction by the fire, "though it has been frequently repeated." Upon the face of it the statement is improbable. If it were a good speculation to print the book two years before the fire, and the stock so printed had been destroyed in the fire, it would have been an equally good speculation to have re-printed it immediately after the fire; and yet the fourth edition did not appear till 1685. Some of the copies of the third edition bear the date of 1663; and we have no doubt that the book was then generally published; for Pepys, under the date of December 10th, 1663, has a curious bibliographical entry:—"To St. Paul's Churchyard, to my bookseller's, and could not tell whether to lay out my money for books of pleasure, as plays, which my nature was most earnest in; but at last, after seeing Chaucer, Dugdale's 'History of Paul's,' Stow's 'London,' Gesner, 'History of Trent,' besides Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont's plays, I at last chose Dr. Fuller's

* Life of Shakespear in 'Lardner's Cyclopædia.'

'Worthies,' 'The Cabbala, or Collections of Letters of State,' and a little book, 'Delices de Hollande,' with another little book or two, all of good use or serious pleasure; and 'Hudibras,' both parts, the book now in greatest fashion for drollery, though I cannot, I confess, see enough where the wit lies." These two folio editions supplied the readers of Shakspeare for more than forty years, but we are not hence to conclude that he was neglected. Of Ben Jonson during the same period there was only one edition; of Beaumont and Fletcher only one; of Spenser only one. Rowe's edition of Shakspeare, we doubt not, supplied a general want. Its critical merits were but small. The facts of the 'Life' which he prefixes have been sufficiently noticed by us in another place. The opinions expressed in that 'Life' are few, and are put forth with little pretension. As might be expected, they fully admit the excellence of Shakspeare, but they somewhat fall into the besetting sin of attempting to elevate his genius by depreciating his knowledge:—"It is without controversy that in his works we scarce find any traces of anything that looks like an imitation of the ancients. The delicacy of his taste, and the natural bent of his own great genius (equal, if not superior, to some of the best of theirs), would certainly have led him to read and study them with so much pleasure that some of their fine images would naturally have insinuated themselves into, and been mixed with, his own writings; so that his not copying at least something from them may be an argument of his never having read them. Whether his ignorance of the ancients were a disadvantage to him or no, may admit of a dispute: for, though the knowledge of them might have made him more correct, yet it is not improbable but that the regularity and deference for them, which would have attended that cor-

rectness, might have restrained some of that fire, impetuosity, and even beautiful extravagance, which we admire in Shakspeare: and I believe we are better pleased with those thoughts, altogether new and uncommon, which his own imagination supplied him so abundantly with, than if he had given us the most beautiful passages out of the Greek and Latin poets, and that in the most agreeable manner that it was possible for a master of the English language to deliver them." Rowe also falls into the notion that Shakspeare did not arrive at his perfection by repeated experiment and assiduous labour,—a theory which still has its believers:—"It would be without doubt a pleasure to any man, curious in things of this kind, to see and know what was the first essay of a fancy like Shakspeare's. Perhaps we are not to look for his beginnings, like those of other authors, among their least perfect writings; art had so little and nature so large a share in what he did, that, for aught I know, the performances of his youth, as they were the most vigorous, and had the most fire and strength of imagination in them, were the best. I would not be thought by this to mean that his fancy was so loose and extravagant as to be independent on the rule and government of judgment; but that what he thought was commonly so great, so justly and rightly conceived in itself, that it wanted little or no correction, and was immediately approved by an impartial judgment at the first sight." He then enters into a brief criticism of some of the leading plays. In speaking of 'The Tempest,' he mentions the observation upon the character of Caliban "which three very great men concurred in making"—telling us in a note that these were Lord Falkland, Lord Chief Justice Vaughan, and Mr. Selden—"That Shakspeare had not only found out a new character in his Caliban, but had also devised and adapted a new manner of language for that character." Of Shakspeare's plays, with reference to their art, he thus speaks:—"If one undertook to examine the greatest part of these by those rules which are established by Aristotle and taken from the model of the Grecian stage, it would

be no very hard task to find a great many faults; but, as Shakspeare lived under a kind of mere light of nature, and had never been made acquainted with the regularity of those written precepts, so it would be hard to judge him by a law he knew nothing of. We are to consider him as a man that lived in a state of almost universal licence and ignorance: there was no established judge, but every one took the liberty to write according to the dictates of his own fancy. When one considers that there is not one play before him of a reputation good enough to entitle it to an appearance on the present stage, it cannot but be a matter of great wonder that he should advance dramatic poetry so far as he did." A second edition of Rowe's 'Shakspeare' appeared in 1714.

In 1725 POPE produced his edition, magnificent as far as printing went, in six volumes quarto. Of its editorial merits we may say a few words when we have to speak of Theobald. His Preface is a masterly composition, containing many just views elegantly expressed. The criticism is neither profound nor original; but there is a tone of quiet sense about it which shows that Pope properly appreciated Shakspeare's general excellence. He believes, in common with most of his time, that this excellence was attained by intuition, and that the finest results were produced by felicitous accidents:—

"If ever any author deserved the name of an *original*, it was Shakspeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature; it proceeded through Egyptian strainers and channels, and came to him not without some tincture of the learning, or some cast of the models, of those before him. The poetry of Shakspeare was inspiration indeed: he is not so much an imitator as an instrument of Nature; and it is not so just to say that he speaks from her as that she speaks through him.

"His *characters* are so much Nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. Those of other poets have a constant resemblance, which shows that they received them from one another, and were but multipliers of

the same image: each picture, like a mock-rainbow, is but the reflection of a reflection. But every single character in Shakspeare is as much an individual as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will, upon comparison, be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of character we must add the wonderful preservation of it; which is such throughout his plays, that, had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker.

"The *power* over our *passions* was never possessed in a more eminent degree, or displayed in so different instances. Yet all along there is seen no labour, no pains to raise them; no preparation to guide or guess to the effect, or be perceived to lead toward it; but the heart swells, and the tears burst out, just at the proper places: we are surprised the moment we weep; and yet upon reflection find the passion so just, that we should be surprised if we had not wept, and wept at that very moment.

"How astonishing it is again that the passions directly opposite to these, laughter and spleen, are no less at his command! That he is not more a master of the *great* than of the *ridiculous* in human nature; of our noblest tendernesses, than of our vainest foibles; of our strongest emotions, than of our idlest sensations!

"Nor does he only excel in the passions; in the coolness of reflection and reasoning he is full as admirable. His *sentiments* are not only in general the most pertinent and judicious upon every subject; but, by a talent very peculiar, something between penetration and felicity, he hits upon that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns, or the force of each motive depends. This is perfectly amazing from a man of no education or experience in those great and public scenes of life which are usually the subject of his thoughts; so that he seems to have known the world by intuition, to have looked through human nature at one glance, and to be the only author that gives ground

for a very new opinion—that the philosopher, and even the man of the world, may be *born* as well as the poet."

These are the excellences of Shakspeare; but Pope holds that he has as great defects, and he sets himself to excuse these by arguing that it was necessary to please the populace. He then proceeds:—

"To judge, therefore, of Shakspeare by Aristotle's rules, is like trying a man by the laws of one country who acted under those of another. He wrote to the *people*, and wrote at first without patronage from the better sort, and therefore without aims of pleasing them; without assistance or advice from the learned, as without the advantage of education or acquaintance among them; without that knowledge of the best models, the ancients, to inspire him with an emulation of them; in a word, without any views of reputation, and of what poets are pleased to call immortality; some or all of which have encouraged the vanity, or animated the ambition, of other writers.

"Yet it must be observed, that, when his performances had merited the protection of his prince, and when the encouragement of the court had succeeded to that of the town, the works of his riper years are manifestly raised above those of his former. The dates of his plays sufficiently evidence that his productions improved in proportion to the respect he had for his auditors. And I make no doubt this observation would be found true in every instance, were but editions extant from which we might learn the exact time when every piece was composed, and whether wrote for the town or the court.

"Another cause (and no less strong than the former) may be deduced from our poet's being a *player*, and forming himself first upon the judgments of that body of men whereof he was a member. They have ever had a standard to themselves, upon other principles than those of Aristotle. As they live by the majority, they know no rule but that of pleasing the present humour, and complying with the wit in fashion—a consideration which brings all their judgment to a short point. Players are just such judges of what is *right* as tailors are of what is *graceful*.

And in this view it will be but fair to allow that most of our author's faults are less to be ascribed to his wrong judgment as a poet than to his right judgment as a player."

Of Shakspeare's learning his editor thus speaks:—

"As to his *want of learning* it may be necessary to say something more: there is certainly a vast difference between *learning* and *languages*. How far he was ignorant of the latter I cannot determine; but it is plain he had much reading at least, if they will not call it learning. Nor is it any great matter, if a man has knowledge, whether he has it from one language or from another. Nothing is more evident than that he had a taste of natural philosophy, mechanics, ancient and modern history, poetical learning, and mythology: we find him very knowing in the customs, rites, and manners of antiquity. . . . The manners of other nations in general, the Egyptians, Venetians, French, &c., are drawn with equal propriety. Whatever object of nature or branch of science he either speaks of or describes, it is always with competent if not extensive knowledge; his descriptions are still exact; all his metaphors appropriated, and remarkably drawn from the true nature and inherent qualities of each subject. When he treats of ethic or politic, we may constantly observe a wonderful justness of distinction as well as extent of comprehension. No one is more a master of the poetical story, or has more frequent allusions to the various parts of it. Mr. Waller (who has been celebrated for this last particular) has not shown more learning this way than Shakspeare. . . .

"I am inclined to think this opinion proceeded originally from the zeal of the partizans of our author and Ben Jonson, as they endeavoured to exalt the one at the expense of the other. It is ever the nature of parties to be in extremes; and nothing is so probable as that, because Ben Jonson had much the more learning, it was said on the one hand that Shakspeare had none at all; and, because Shakspeare had much the most wit and fancy, it was retorted on the other that Jonson wanted both. Because Shakspeare borrowed nothing, it was said that Ben

Jonson borrowed everything. Because Jonson did not write extempore, he was reproached with being a year about every piece; and, because Shakspeare wrote with ease and rapidity, they cried, he never once made a blot. Nay, the spirit of opposition ran so high, that whatever those of the one side objected to the other was taken at the rebound, and turned into praises, as injudiciously as their antagonists before had made them objections."

Much of Pope's Preface is then occupied with illustrations of his opinion that Shakspeare's works have come down to us defaced with innumerable blunders and absurdities which are not to be attributed to the author. We cannot at all yield our consent to this opinion, which goes upon the assumption that, whenever there is an obscure passage; whenever "mean conceits and ribaldries" are found; whenever "low scenes of mobs, plebeians, and clowns" are very prominent; there the players have been at work; and he thus argues upon the assumption:—"If we give in to this opinion, how many low and vicious parts and passages might no longer reflect upon this great genius, but appear unworthily charged upon him! And, even in those which are really his, how many faults may have been unjustly laid to his account from arbitrary additions, expunctions, transpositions of scenes and lines, confusion of characters and persons, wrong application of speeches, corruptions of innumerable passages by the ignorance, and wrong corrections of them again by the impertinence, of his first editors! From one or other of these considerations I am verily persuaded that the greatest and the grossest part of what are thought his errors would vanish, and leave his character in a light very different from that disadvantageous one in which it now appears to us." There is a larger question even than this that Pope propounds. *Are these parts and passages low and vicious? Have we these corruptions and imperfections? We believe not.* Pope accepted Shakspeare in the spirit of his time, and that was not favourable to the proper understanding of him. His concluding observations are characteristic of his critical

power:—"I will conclude by saying of Shakspeare, that, with all his faults, and with all the irregularity of his *drama*, one may look upon his works, in comparison of those that are more finished and regular, as upon an ancient majestic piece of Gothic architecture compared with a neat modern building; the latter is more elegant and glaring, but the former is more strong and more solemn. It must be allowed that in one of these there are materials enough to make many of the other. It has much the greater variety, and much the nobler apartments; though we are often conducted to them by dark, odd, and uncouth passages. Nor does the whole fail to strike us with greater reverence, though many of the parts are childish, ill-placed, and unequal to its grandeur."

In 1726 LEWIS THEOBALD published a tract entitled 'Shakespear Restored, or Specimens of Blunders Committed and Unamended in Pope's Edition of this Poet.' In Pope's second edition of Shakspeare, which appeared in 1728, was inserted this contemptuous notice:—"Since the publication of our first edition, there having been some attempts upon Shakspeare published by Lewis Theobald (which he would not communicate during the time wherein that edition was preparing for the press, when we, by public advertisements, did request the assistance of all lovers of this author), we have inserted, in this impression, as many of 'em as are judged of any the least advantage to the poet; the whole amounting to about twenty-five words." In the same year came out 'The Dunciad,' of which Theobald was the hero:—

"High on a gorgeous seat that far outshone
Henley's gilt tub, or Flecknoe's Irish throne,
Great Tibbald nods."

In a few years Theobald was deposed from this throne, and there, then, "Great Cibber sate." The facility with which Theobald was transformed to Cibber is one of the many proofs that Pope threw his darts and dirt about him at random. But Theobald took a just revenge. In 1733 he produced an edition of Shakspeare, in seven volumes octavo, which annihilated Pope's quartos and duo-

decimos. The title-page of Theobald's Shakspeare bore that it was 'collated with the oldest copies, and corrected, with Notes.' Pope's edition was not again reprinted in London; but of Theobald's there have been many subsequent editions, and Steevens asserts that of his first edition thirteen thousand copies were sold. Looking at the advantage which Pope possessed in the pre-eminence of his literary reputation, the preference which was so decidedly given to Theobald's editions is a proof that the public thought for themselves in the matter of Shakspeare. Pope was not fitted for the more laborious duties of an editor. He collated, indeed, the early copies, but he set about the emendation of the text in a manner so entirely arbitrary, suppressing passage after passage upon the principle that the players had been at work here, and a blundering transcriber there, that no reader of Shakspeare could rely upon the integrity of Pope's version. Theobald states the contrary mode in which *he* proceeded:—

"Wherever the author's sense is clear and discoverable (though, perchance, low and trivial), I have not by any innovation tampered with his text, out of an ostentation of endeavouring to make him speak better than the old copies have done.

"Where, through all the former editions, a passage has laboured under flat nonsense and invincible darkness, if, by the addition or alteration of a letter or two, or a transposition in the pointing, I have restored to him both sense and sentiment, such corrections, I am persuaded, will need no indulgence.

"And whenever I have taken a greater latitude and liberty in amending, I have constantly endeavoured to support my corrections and conjectures by parallel passages and authorities from himself, the surest means of expounding any author whatsoever."

Dr. Johnson accurately enough describes the causes and consequences of Pope's failure:—"Confidence is the common consequence of success. They whose excellence of any kind has been loudly celebrated are ready to conclude that their powers are universal. Pope's edition fell below his own expectations, and he was so much offended,

when he was found to have left anything for others to do, that he passed the latter part of his life in a state of hostility with verbal criticism." But Johnson does not exhibit his usual good sense and knowledge of mankind when he attributes Theobald's success to the world's compassion. He calls him weak and ignorant, mean and faithless, petulant and ostentatious; but he affirms that this editor, "by the good luck of having Pope for his enemy, has escaped, and escaped alone, with reputation, from this undertaking. So willingly does the world support those who solicit favour against those who command reverence; and so easily is he praised whom no man can envy." This is mere fine writing. The real secret of Theobald's success is stated by Johnson himself:—"Pope was succeeded by Theobald, a man of narrow comprehension and small acquisitions, with no native and intrinsic splendour of genius, with little of the artificial light of learning, but zealous for minute accuracy, and not negligent in pursuing it. He collated the ancient copies, and rectified many errors. A man so anxiously scrupulous might have been expected to do more, but what little he did was commonly right." It was because Theobald was "anxiously scrupulous," because he did not attempt "to do more" than an editor ought to do, that he had the public support. Nearly every succeeding editor, in his scorn of Theobald, his confidence in himself, and, what was the most influential, his want of reverence for his author, endeavoured to make Shakspeare "speak better than the old copies have done." Each for a while had his applause, but it was not a lasting fame.

There is little in Theobald's Preface to mark the progress of opinion on the writings of Shakspeare. Some parts of this Preface are held to have been written by Warburton; but, if so, his arrogance must have been greatly modified by Theobald's judgment. There is not much general remark upon the character of the poet's writings; but what we find is sensibly conceived and not inelegantly expressed. We shall content ourselves with extracting one passage:—"In how many points of sight must we be obliged to gaze at

this great poet! In how many branches of excellence to consider and admire him! Whether we view him on the side of art or nature, he ought equally to engage our attention: whether we respect the force and greatness of his genius, the extent of his knowledge and reading, the power and address with which he throws out and applies either nature or learning, there is ample scope both for our wonder and pleasure. If his diction and the clothing of his thoughts attract us, how much more must we be charmed with the richness and variety of his images and ideas! If his images and ideas steal into our souls and strike upon our fancy, how much are they improved in price when we come to reflect with what propriety and justness they are applied to character! If we look into his characters, and how they are furnished and proportioned to the employment he cuts out for them, how are we taken up with the mastery of his portraits! What draughts of nature! What variety of originals, and how differing each from the other!"

Undeterred by the failure of Pope in his slashing amputations, Sir THOMAS HANMER appeared, in 1744, with a splendid edition in six volumes quarto, printed at the Oxford University Press. Nothing can be more satisfactory than the paper and the type. The work was intended as a monument to the memory of Shakspeare; one of the modes in which the national homage was to be expressed:—"As a fresh acknowledgment hath lately been paid to his merit, and a high regard to his name and memory, by erecting his statue at a public expense; so it is desired that this new edition of his works, which hath cost some attention and care, may be looked upon as another small monument designed and dedicated to his honour." Capell, who came next as an editor, says truly of Hanmer that he "pursues a track in which it is greatly to be hoped he will never be followed in the publication of any authors whatsoever, for this were in effect to annihilate them if carried a little further." Collins's 'Epistle to Sir Thomas Hanmer on his Edition of Shakspeare's Works' is an elegant though

not very vigorous attempt to express the universal admiration that the people of England felt for the great national poet. The verse-homage to Shakspeare after the days of Milton had no very original character. The cuckoo-note with which these warblers generally interspersed their varied lays was the echo of Milton's "wood-notes wild," which they did not perceive had a limited application to some particular play—As You Like It, for instance. In Rowe's prologue to 'Jane Shore' we have,—

"In such an age immortal Shakspeare wrote,
By no quaint rules nor hamp'ring critics taught;
With rough majestic force he mov'd the heart,
And strength and nature made amends for art."

Thomson asks—

"For lofty sense,
Creative fancy, and inspection keen
Through the deep windings of the human heart,
Is not wild Shakspeare thine and nature's boast?"

T. Seward, addressing Stratford, says,—

"Thy bard was thine unschool'd."

Collins's Epistle begins thus, speaking of the works of Shakspeare :—

"Hard was the lot those injur'd strains endur'd,
Unown'd by science."

But Collins, in many respects a true poet, has a higher inspiration in his invocations of the great master of the drama than most of his fellows :—

"O more than all in powerful genius bless'd,
Come, take thine empire o'er the willing breast!
Whate'er the wounds this youthful heart shall feel,
Thy songs support me, and thy morals heal.
There every thought the poet's warmth may raise,
There native music dwells in all the lays."

To Hanmer succeeded WARBURTON, with a new edition of Pope, enriched with his own most original notes. If it were not painful to associate Shakspeare, the great master of

practical wisdom, with a critic who delights in the most extravagant paradoxes, we might prefer the amusement of Warburton's edition to toiling through the heaps of verbal criticism which later years saw heaped up. Warburton, of course, belonged to the school of slashing emendators. The opening of his preface tells us what we are to expect from him :—

"It hath been no unusual thing for writers, when dissatisfied with the patronage or judgment of their own times, to appeal to posterity for a fair hearing. Some have even thought fit to apply to it in the first instance, and to decline acquaintance with the public till envy and prejudice had quite subsided. But, of all the trusters to futurity, commend me to the author of the following poems, who not only left it to time to do him justice as it would, but to find him out as it could: for, what between too great attention to his profit as a player, and too little to his reputation as a poet, his works, left to the care of door-keepers and prompters, hardly escaped the common fate of those writings, how good soever, which are abandoned to their own fortune, and unprotected by party or cabal. At length, indeed, they struggled into light; but so disguised and travestied, that no classic author, after having run ten secular stages through the blind cloisters of monks and canons, ever came out in half so maimed and mangled a condition."

There is little in Warburton's preface which possesses any lasting interest, perhaps with the exception of his defence against the charge that editing Shakspeare was unsuitable to his clerical profession :—

"The great Saint Chrysostom, a name consecrated to immortality by his virtue and eloquence, is known to have been so fond of Aristophanes as to wake with him at his studies, and to sleep with him under his pillow; and I never heard that this was objected either to his piety or his preaching, not even in those times of pure zeal and primitive religion. Yet, in respect of Shakspeare's great sense, Aristophanes's best wit is but buffoonery; and, in comparison of Aristophanes's freedoms, Shakspeare writes with the purity of a vestal. . . . Of all the literary

exercitations of speculative men, whether designed for the use or entertainment of the world, there are none of so much importance, or what are more our immediate concern, than those which let us into the knowledge of our nature. Others may exercise the reason, or amuse the imagination; but these only can improve the heart, and form the human mind to wisdom. Now, in this science our Shakspeare is confessed to occupy the foremost place, whether we consider the amazing sagacity with which he investigates every hidden spring and wheel of human action, or his happy manner of communicating this knowledge, in the just and living paintings which he has given us

of all our passions, appetites, and pursuits. These afford a lesson which can never be too often repeated, or too constantly inculcated; and to engage the reader's due attention to it hath been one of the principal objects of this edition.

"As this science (whatever profound philosophers may think) is, to the rest, *in things*, so, *in words* (whatever supercilious pedants may talk), every one's mother-tongue is to all other languages. This hath still been the sentiment of nature and true wisdom. Hence, the greatest men of antiquity never thought themselves better employed than in cultivating their own country idiom."

CHAPTER IV.

JOHNSON.—VOLTAIRE.—MRS. MONTAGU.—MARTIN SHERLOCK.—HUME.

It was in the year 1741 that David Garrick at once leaped into eminence as an actor, such as had not been won by any man for half a century. He was the true successor of Burbage, Betterton, and Harris. His principal fame was, however, like theirs, founded upon Shakspeare. But it is a mistake to imagine that there had not been a constant succession of actors of Shakspeare's great characters, from the death of Betterton to Garrick's appearance. His first character in London was Richard III. He made all the great parts of Shakspeare familiar to the play-going public for five-and-thirty years. 'The Alchymist' and the 'Volpone' of Ben Jonson were sometimes played; 'The Chances,' and 'Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,' of Beaumont and Fletcher; but we are told by Davies, in his 'Dramatic Miscellanies,' that, of their fifty-four plays, only these two preserved their rank on the stage. This is a pretty convincing proof of what the public opinion of Shakspeare was in the middle of the last century. The Prologue of Samuel Johnson, spoken by Garrick at the opening of Drury-lane Theatre in 1747, is an eloquent expression of the same opinion:—

"When Learning's triumph o'er her barbarous foes

First rear'd the stage, immortal Shakspeare rose;

Each change of many-colour'd life he drew,
Exhausted worlds, and then imagin'd new:
Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,
And panting Time toil'd after him in vain.
His powerful strokes presiding truth impress'd,

And unresisted passion storm'd the breast.

"Then Jonson came, instructed from the school

To please in method, and invent by rule;
His studious patience and laborious art
By regular approach essay'd the heart;
Cold approbation gave the lingering bays;
For those who durst not censure scarce could praise.

A mortal born, he met the gen'ral doom,
But left, like Egypt's kings, a lasting tomb.

"The wits of Charles found easier ways to fame,
Nor wish'd for Jonson's art, or Shakspeare's fame.

Themselves they studied; as they felt, they writ:

Intrigue was plot, obscenity was wit.

Vice always found a sympathetic friend ;
 They pleas'd their age, and did not aim to
 mend.
 Yet bards like these aspir'd to lasting praise,
 And proudly hop'd to pimp in future days.
 Their cause was gen'ral, their supports were
 strong ;
 Their slaves were willing, and their reign was
 long :
 Till Shame regain'd the post that Sense be-
 tray'd,
 And Virtue call'd Oblivion to her aid.

“Then, crush'd by rules, and weaken'd as
 refin'd,
 For years the pow'r of Tragedy declin'd ;
 From bard to bard the frigid caution crept,
 Till declamation roar'd whilst passion slept ;
 Yet still did Virtue deign the stage to tread,
 Philosophy remain'd though Nature fled.
 But forc'd, at length, her ancient reign to quit,
 She saw great Faustus lay the ghost of Wit ;
 Exulting Folly hail'd the joyous day,
 And pantomime and song confirm'd her sway.”

It is tolerably evident, from the whole tenour of this celebrated prologue, that of the early dramatists Shakspeare reigned upon the stage supreme, if not almost alone. It has been the fault of actors, and the flatterers of actors, to believe that a dramatic poet is only known to the world through their lips. Garrick was held to have given life to Shakspeare. The following inscription on Garrick's tomb in Westminster Abbey has been truly held by Charles Lamb to be “a farrago of false thoughts and nonsense :”—

“To paint fair Nature, by divine command,
 Her magic pencil in her glowing hand,
 A Shakspeare rose ; then, to expand his fame
 Wide o'er this breathing world, a Garrick
 came.
 Though sunk to death the forms the Poet
 drew,
 The Actor's genius bade them breathe anew ;
 Though, like the bard himself, in night they
 lay,
 Immortal Garrick call'd them back to day :
 And till Eternity with power sublime
 Shall mark the mortal hour of hoary Time,
 Shakspeare and Garrick like twin stars shall
 shine,
 And earth irradiate with a beam divine.”

Up to the end of the first half of the

eighteenth century, when, according to the epitaph, the poet's forms were sunk in death and lay in night, there had been thirteen editions of Shakspeare's collected works, nine of which had appeared during the preceding forty years. Of Ben Jonson there had been three editions in the seventeenth century, and one in the eighteenth ; of Beaumont and Fletcher two in the seventeenth century, and one in the eighteenth. Yet, absurd and impertinent as it may be to talk of immortal Garrick calling the plays of Shakspeare back to day, it cannot be denied that the very power of those plays to create a school of great actors was in itself a cause of their extension amongst readers. The most monstrous alterations, perpetrated with the worst taste, and with the most essential ignorance of Shakspeare's art, were still in some sort tributes to his power. The actors sent many to read Shakspeare with a true delight ; and then it was felt how little he needed the aid of acting, and how much indeed of his highest excellence could only be received into the mind by reverent meditation.

In 1765 appeared, in eight volumes octavo, ‘The Plays of William Shakspeare, with the Corrections and Illustrations of various Commentators : to which are added Notes by Samuel JOHNSON.’ This was the foundation of the variorum editions, the principle of which has been to select from all the commentary, or nearly all, that has been produced, every opinion upon a passage, however conflicting. The respective value of the critics who had preceded him are fully discussed by Johnson in the latter part of his Preface : this branch of the subject was only of temporary interest. But the larger portion of Johnson's Preface not only to a certain extent represented the tone of opinion in Johnson's age, but was written with so much pomp of diction, with such apparent candour, and with such abundant manifestations of good sense, that, perhaps more than any other production, it has influenced the public opinion of Shakspeare up to this day. That the influence has been, for the most part, evil, we have no hesitation in believing. This celebrated Preface is accessible to most readers of Shakspeare.

It was observed by Warburton, in 1747, that the fit criticism for Shakspeare was not such "as may be raised mechanically on the rules which Dacier, Rapin, and Bossu have collected from antiquity : and of which such kind of writers as Rymer, Gildon, Dennis, and Oldmixon, have only gathered and chewed the husks." But he goes on to infer that "crude and superficial judgments on books and things" had taken the place of the older mechanical criticism ; and that there was "a deluge of the worst sort of critical jargon—that which looks most like sense." The rules of art, as they were called, having been rejected as inapplicable to Shakspeare, a swarm of writers arose who considered that he was to be judged without the application of any general principles at all. They held that he wrote without a system ; that the absence of this system produced his excellences and his faults ; that his absurdities were as striking as his beauties ; that he was the most careless and hasty of writers ; and that therefore it was the business of all grave and discreet critics to warn the unenlightened multitude against his blunders, his contradictions, his violations of sense and decency. This was the critical *school of individual judgment*, which has lasted for more than a century amongst us ; and which, to our minds, is a far more corrupting thing than the pedantries of all the Gildons and Dennises who have eat paper and drunk ink. Before the publication of Johnson's preface (which, being of a higher order of composition than what had previously been produced upon Shakspeare, seemed to establish fixed rules for opinion), the impertinences which were poured out by the feeblest minds upon Shakspeare's merits and demerits surpass all ordinary belief. Mrs. Charlotte Lennox, in whose 'Shakespear Illustrated' Johnson himself is reputed to have had some hand, is an average specimen of the insolence of that critical jargon "which looks most like sense." Mrs. Lennox was evidently a very small-minded person attempting to form a judgment upon a very high subject. But it was not only the small minds which uttered such babble in the last century. Samuel

Johnson himself, in some of his critical opinions upon individual plays, is not very far above the good lady whom he patronized. What shall we think of the prosaic approbation of 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream ?'—"Wild and fantastical as this play is, all the parts in their various modes are well written." What of his praise of 'Romeo and Juliet ?'—"His comic scenes are happily wrought, but his pathetic strains are always polluted with some unexpected depravations." What of the imputed omissions in 'As You Like It ?'—"By hastening to the end of this work Shakspeare suppressed the dialogue between the usurper and the hermit, and lost an opportunity of exhibiting a moral lesson in which he might have found matter worthy of his highest powers." What of the pompous seesawing about 'Macbeth ?'—"It has no nice discriminations of character. The danger of ambition is well described. The passions are directed to the true end. Lady Macbeth is merely detested ; and, though the courage of Macbeth preserves some esteem, yet every reader rejoices at his fall." What, lastly, shall we say to the bow-wow about 'Cymbeline ?'—"To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility—upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation." All that we can in truth say of these startling things is this—that this learned, sensible, sometimes profound, and really great man, having trampled upon the unities and other tests of poetical merit, the fashion of Dryden's age but not of his own, is perpetually groping about in the mists of his private judgment, now pursuing a glimmering of light, now involved in outer darkness. This system of criticism upon Shakspeare was rotten to the foundation. It was based upon an extension and a misapplication of Ben Jonson's dogmatic assertion—"He wanted art." The art of Shakspeare was not revealed to the critics of the last century. Let us hear one to whom the principles of this art were revealed :—"It is a painful truth, that

not only individuals, but even whole nations, are oftentimes so enslaved to the habits of their education and immediate circumstances, as not to judge disinterestedly even on those subjects the very pleasure arising from which consists in its disinterestedness, namely, on subjects of taste and polite literature. Instead of deciding concerning their own modes and customs by any rule of reason, nothing appears rational, becoming, or beautiful to them but what coincides with the peculiarities of their education. In this narrow circle individuals may attain to exquisite discrimination, as the French critics have done in their own literature; but a true critic can no more be such, without placing himself on some central point, from which he may command the whole,—that is, some general rule, which, founded in reason, or the faculties common to all men, must therefore apply to each,—than an astronomer can explain the movements of the solar system without taking his stand in the sun.”*

Samuel Johnson proposes to inquire, in his preface, “by what peculiarities of excellence Shakspeare has gained and kept the favour of his countrymen.” He answers the question at considerable length, by displaying what he holds to be the great peculiarity of his excellence:—“Shakspeare is, above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. . . . This, therefore, is the praise of Shakspeare—that his drama is the mirror of life.” Such is the leading idea of the critic. He sees nothing higher in Shakspeare than an exhibition of the *real*. “He who has mazed his imagination in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.” When Johnson is unable to trace this actual picture of life in Shakspeare, when he perceives any deviations from the regular “transactions of the world,” or the due “progress of the pas-

sions,” then he is bewildered; and he generally ends in blaming his author. The characteristic excellence, he says, of the tragedy of ‘Hamlet,’ is “variety.” According to his notion that in all Shakspeare’s dramas we find “an interchange of seriousness and merriment, by which the mind is softened at one time and exhilarated at another,” he holds, that “the pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth.” But, in the conduct of the plot, the business of life and the course of the passions do not proceed with the regularity which he desires:—“Of the feigned madness of Hamlet there appears no adequate cause. . . . Hamlet is, through the whole piece, rather an instrument than an agent. After he has by the stratagem of the play convicted the king, he makes no attempt to punish him. . . . The catastrophe is not very happily produced.” Where is the mistake in all this? It is in taking a very limited view of the object and scope of Art. “It is its object and aim to bring within the circle of our senses, perceptions, and emotions, everything which has existence in the mind of man. Art should realize in us the well-known saying, *Nihil humani a me alienum puto*. Its appointed aim is to awake and give vitality to all slumbering feelings, affections, and passions; to fill and expand the heart; and to make man, whether developed or undeveloped, feel in every fibre of his being *all* that human nature can endure, experience, and bring forth in her innermost and most secret recesses—*all* that has power to move and arouse the heart of man in its profoundest depths, manifold capabilities, and various phases; to garner up for our enjoyment whatever, in the exercise of thought and imagination, the mind discovers of high and intrinsic merit, the grandeur of the lofty, the eternal, and the true, and present it to our feeling and contemplation. In like manner, to make pain and sorrow, and even vice and wrong, become clear to us; to bring the heart into immediate acquaintance with the awful and the terrible, as well as with the joyous and pleasurable; and, lastly, to lead the fancy to hover gently, dreamily, on the wing of imagination, and entice her to

* Coleridge’s ‘Literary Remains,’ vol. ii. p. 63.

revel in the seductive witchery of its voluptuous emotion and contemplation. Art should employ this manifold richness of its subject-matter to supply on the one hand the deficiencies of our actual experience of external life, and on the other hand to excite in us those passions which shall cause the actual events of life to move us more deeply and awaken our susceptibility for receiving impressions of all kinds."*

This is something higher than Johnson's notion of Shakspeare's art—higher as that notion was than the mechanical criticism of the age which preceded him. But the inconsistencies into which the critic is betrayed show the narrowness and weakness of his foundations. The drama of Shakspeare is "a mirror of life;" and yet, according to the critic, it is the great sin of Shakspeare that he is perpetually violating "poetical justice." Thus Johnson says in the preface, "He makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance." Johnson could not have avoided seeing that, if Shakspeare had not carried his persons "indifferently though right and wrong," he would not have exhibited "the real state of sublunary nature." But there was something much higher that Shakspeare would not then have done. Had he gone upon the principle of teaching an impracticable and therefore an unnatural theory of rewards and punishments in human affairs, if he had not intended that "his precepts and axioms" *should* "drop casually from him," he would have lost his supereminent power of gradually raising the mind into a comprehension of what belongs to the spiritual part of our nature; of exciting a deep sympathy with strong emotion and lofty passion; of producing an expansion of the heart, which embraces all the manifestations of human goodness and human sorrow; and, what is

more, which penetrates into the abysses of guilt and degradation, and shows that there is no true peace, and no real resting-place, for what separates us from our fellow men and from our God. This is not to be effected by didactic precepts *not* dropped casually; by false representations of the course of worldly affairs and the workings of man's secret heart. The mind comprehends the *whole* truth, when it is elevated by the art of the poet into a fit state for its comprehension. The *whole* moral purpose is then evolved, through a series of deductions in the mind of him who is thus moved. This is the highest logic, because it is based upon the broadest premises. Rymer sneers at Shakspeare when he says that the moral of 'Othello' is, that maidens of quality should not run away with blackamoors. The sarcasm only tells upon those who demand any literal moral in a high work of art.

Because Johnson only saw in Shakspeare's dramas "a mirror of life," he prefers his comedy to his tragedy. "His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct." When the poet is working with grander materials than belong to the familiar scenes of life, however natural and universal, the critic does not see that the region of literal things is necessarily abandoned—that skill must be more manifest in its effects. We are then in a world of higher reality than every-day reality. "In tragedy he often writes with great appearance of toil and study what is written at last with little felicity." This now strikes the most superficial student of Shakspeare as monstrous. We open 'Irene,' and we understand it. "He omits opportunities of instructing or delighting which the train of his story seems to force upon him, and apparently rejects those exhibitions which would be more affecting for the sake of those which are more easy." It is a great privilege of the art of Shakspeare, that in his most tragical scenes he never takes us out of the region of pleasurable emotions. It was his higher art, as compared with the lower art of Otway. He does reject "those exhibitions which would be more affecting," but not "for the sake of those which are more easy." Let any one try which is the

* We quote this from a very able article in the 'British and Foreign Review,' on Hegel's 'Æsthetics.' The passage is Hegel's.

more easy, "to touch a soul to the quick, to lay upon fear as much as it can bear, to wean and weary a life till it is ready to drop," as Charles Lamb describes the tragic art of Webster; or to make a Desdemona, amidst the indignities which are heaped upon her, and the fears which subdue her soul, move tranquilly in an atmosphere of poetical beauty, thinking of the maid that

"had a song of—willow;
An old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune,
And she died singing it."

It is a rude conception which Johnson has of Shakspeare's art, when he says of the play of 'Hamlet,' "The scenes are interchangeably diversified with merriment and solemnity. . . . The pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth; the mournful distraction of Ophelia fills the heart with tenderness; and every personage produces the effect intended." True. But it was no intended effect of the madness of Hamlet to cause "much mirth." Every word that Hamlet utters has something in it which sounds the depths of our intellectual being, because every word is consistent with his own character, which, of all poetical creations, sends us most to search into the mysteries of our own individual natures. This, if we understand it aright, is *poetry*. But Johnson says, "Voltaire expresses his wonder that our author's extravagances are endured by a nation which has seen the tragedy of 'Cato.' Let him be answered, that Addison speaks the language of poets, and Shakspeare of men. We find in 'Cato' innumerable beauties which enamour us of its author, but we see nothing that acquaints us with human sentiments or human actions; we place it with the fairest and noblest progeny which judgment propagates by conjunction with learning; but 'Othello' is the vigorous and vivacious offspring of observation, impregnated with genius." If Addison speaks "the language of poets," properly so called, 'Cato' is poetry. If Shakspeare speaks the language of men, as distinct from the language of poets, 'Othello' is *not* poetry. It needs no further argument to show that the critic has a false theory of

the poetical art. He has here narrowed the question to an absurdity.

We may observe, from what Johnson says of "the minute and slender criticism of VOLTAIRE," that the English critics fancied that, doing Shakspeare ample justice themselves, they were called upon to defend him from the mistaken criticisms of a foreign school. Every Englishman, from the period of Johnson, who has fancied himself absolved from the guilt of not admiring and understanding Shakspeare has taken up a stone to cast at Voltaire. Those who speak of Voltaire as an ignorant and tasteless calumniator of Shakspeare forget that his hostility was based upon a system of art which he conceived, and rightly so, was opposed to the system of Shakspeare. He had been bred up in the school of Corneille and Racine, the glories of his countrymen; and it is really a remarkable proof of the vigour of his mind that he tolerated so much as he did in Shakspeare, and admired so much; in this respect going farther perhaps than many of our own countrymen of no mean reputation, such as Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke in 1730. In his 'Discourse on Tragedy,' prefixed to 'Brutus,' and addressed to Bolingbroke in that year, he says, "Not being able, my lord, to risk upon the French stage verses without rhyme, such as are the usage of Italy and of England, I have at least desired to transport to our scene certain beauties of yours. It is true, and I avow it, that the English theatre is very faulty. *I have heard from your mouth that you have not a good tragedy.* But in compensation you have some admirable scenes in these very monstrous pieces. Until the present time almost all the tragic authors of your nation have wanted that purity, that regular conduct, those *bienséances* of action and style, that elegance, and all those refinements of art, which have established the reputation of the French theatre since the great Corneille. But the most irregular of your pieces have one grand merit—it is that of *action*." In the same letter we have his opinion of Shakspeare, which is certainly not that of a cold critic, but of one who admired even where he could not approve, and blamed as we had been accustomed to

blame:—"With what pleasure have I seen in London your tragedy of 'Julius Cæsar,' which for a hundred and fifty years has been the delight of your nation! I assuredly do not pretend to approve the barbarous irregularities with which it abounds. It is only astonishing that one finds not more of them in a work composed in an age of ignorance, by a man who even knew not Latin, and who had no master but his own genius. But, in the midst of so many gross faults, with what ravishment have I seen Brutus," &c. All this is perfectly intelligible, and demands no harsher censure than we have a right to apply to Dryden, who says nearly as strong things, and writes most of his own tragedies in the spirit of a devoted worshipper of the French school. In 1761, some thirty years after his letter to Bolingbroke, Voltaire writes 'An Essay on the English Theatre,' in which he expresses the wonder, which Johnson notices, that the nation which has 'Cato' can endure Shakspeare. In this essay he has a long analysis of 'Hamlet,' in which, without attempting to penetrate at all into the real idea of that drama, he gives such an account of the plot as may exaggerate what he regards as its absurdities. He then says, "We cannot have a more forcible example of the difference of taste among nations. Let us, after this, speak of the rules of Aristotle, and the three unities, and the *bienséances*, and the necessity of never leaving the scene empty, and that no person should go out or come in without a sensible reason. Let us talk, after this, of the artful arrangement of the plot and its natural development; of the expressions being simple and noble; of making princes speak with the decency which they always have, or ought to have; of never violating the rules of language. It is clear that a whole nation may be enchanted without giving oneself such trouble." No one can be more consistent than Voltaire in the expression of his opinions. It is not the individual judgment of the man betraying him into a doubtful and varying tone, but his uniform theory of the poetical art, which directs all his censure of Shakspeare; and which therefore makes his admiration, such

as it is, of more value than the vague homage of those who, despising, or affecting to despise, Voltaire's system, have embraced no system of their own, and thus infallibly come to be more dogmatical, more supercilious, in their abuse, and more creeping in their praise, than the most slavish disciple of a school wholly opposed to Shakspeare, but consecrated by time, by high example, and by national opinion. The worst things which Voltaire has said of Shakspeare are conceived in this spirit, and therefore ought not in truth to offend Shakspeare's warmest admirers. "He had a genius full of power and fruitfulness, of the natural and the sublime"—this is the praise. The dispraise is linked to it:—"Without the least spark of good taste, and without the slightest knowledge of rules." We may dissent from this, but it is not fair to quarrel with it. He then goes on:—"I will say a hazardous thing, but true, that the merit of this author has ruined the English theatre. There are so many fine scenes, so many grand and terrible passages spread through his monstrous farces which they call tragedies, that his pieces have always been represented with extreme success."* We smile at the man's power of ridicule when he travesties a plot of Shakspeare, as in the dissertation prefixed to 'Semiramis.' But his object is so manifest—that of the elevation of his own theory of art—that he cannot outrage us. For what is his conclusion? That Shakspeare would have been a perfect poet if he had lived in the time of Addison†.

The famous 'Letter to the Academy,' in 1776, was the crowning effort of Voltaire's hostility to Shakspeare. In that year was announced a complete translation of Shakspeare; and several of the plays were published as a commencement of the undertaking. France, according to Grimm, was in a ferment‡. The announcement of this translation appears to have enraged Voltaire. It said that Shakspeare was the creator of the sublime art of the theatre, which received from his hands existence and perfection;

* 'Lettres Philosophiques.' Lettre 18.

† 'Dictionnaire Philosophique.'

‡ 'Correspondance,' 3^{me} partie, tome 1^{re}.

and, what was personally offensive, it added that Shakspeare was unknown in France, or, rather, disfigured. Voltaire tells the Academy that *he* was the first who made Shakspeare known in France, by the translation of some of his passages; that he had translated, too, the 'Julius Cæsar.' But he is indignant that the new translators would sacrifice France to England, in paying no homage to the great French dramatists, whose pieces are acted throughout Europe. He notices, then, the four plays which they have translated, and calls upon them, of course in his tone of exaggeration and ridicule, to render faithfully certain passages which they have slurred over. But Voltaire avows the support which he receives from the English themselves in his condemnation of what he holds to be the absurdities of Shakspeare, quoting from Marmontel in this matter:—"The English have learned to correct and abridge Shakspeare. Garrick has banished from his scene the Grave-diggers in 'Hamlet,' and has omitted nearly all the fifth act." Voltaire then adds,—"The translator agrees not with this truth; he takes the part of the gravediggers; he would preserve them as a respectable monument of an unique genius." The critic then gives a scene of 'Bajazet,' contrasting it with the opening scene of 'Romeo and Juliet.' "It is for you," he says to the Academicians, "to decide which method we ought to follow—that of Shakspeare, the god of tragedy, or of Racine." In a similar way he contrasts a passage in Corneille and 'Lear':—"Let the Academicians judge if the nation which has produced 'Iphigénie' and 'Athalie' ought to abandon them, to behold men and women strangled upon the stage, street-porters, sorcerers, buffoons, and drunken priests—if our court, so long renowned for its politeness and its taste, ought to be changed into an alehouse and a wine-shop." In this letter to the Academy Voltaire loses his temper and his candour. He is afraid to risk any admiration of Shakspeare. But this intolerance is more intelligible than the apologies of Shakspeare's defenders in England. We must confess that we have more sympathy with Voltaire's earnest attack upon Shakspeare than with Mrs. MONTAGU's maudlin defence.

Take a specimen:—"Our author, by following minutely the chronicles of the times, has embarrassed his dramas with too great a number of persons and events. The hurly-burly of these plays recommended them to a rude, illiterate audience, who, as he says, loved a noise of targets. His poverty, and the low condition of the stage (which at that time was not frequented by persons of rank), obliged him to this complaisance; and, unfortunately, he had not been tutored by any rules of art, or informed by acquaintance with just and regular dramas."* She gives a speech of Lear, and says, "Thus it is that Shakspeare redeems the nonsense, the indecorums, the irregularities of his plays." Again, in her criticism on 'Macbeth':—"Our author is too much addicted to the obscure bombast much affected by all sorts of writers in that age. . . . There are many bombast speeches in the tragedy of 'Macbeth,' and these are the lawful prize of the critic." The exhibition of the fickle humour of the mob in Julius 'Cæsar' is not to be "entirely condemned." "The quarrel between Brutus and Cassius does not, by any means, deserve the ridicule thrown upon it by the French critic: . . . but it rather retards than brings forward the catastrophe, and is useful only in setting Brutus in a good light." One more extract from Mrs. Montagu, and we have done:—"It has been demonstrated with great ingenuity and candour that he was destitute of learning: the age was rude and void of taste; but what had a still more pernicious influence on his works was, that the court and the universities, the statesmen and scholars, affected a scientific jargon. An obscurity of expression was thought the veil of wisdom and knowledge; and that mist, common to the morn and eve of literature, which in fact proves it is not at its high meridian, was affectingly thrown over the writings, and even the conversation of the learned, who often preferred images distorted or magnified, to a simple exposition of their thoughts. Shakspeare is never more worthy of the true critic's censure than in those instances in which he complies with this false pomp of manner. It was par-

* 'Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakspeare.'

donable in a man of his rank not to be more polite and delicate than his contemporaries; but we cannot so easily excuse such superiority of talents for stooping to any affectation." This half-patronising, half-vindicating tone is very well meant; and we respect Mrs. Montagu for coming forward to break a lance with the great European critic; but the very celebrity of Shakspeare's "fair warrior" is one of the proofs that there was no real school of criticism amongst us.

Apologies for Shakspeare, lamentations over his defects, explanations of the causes of them,—rude age, unlettered audience, the poet himself working without knowledge,—all this, the invariable language of the English critics, is eagerly laid hold of, not only to justify the hostility of Voltaire, but to perpetuate the reign of a system altogether opposed to the system of Shakspeare, up to the present hour. M. Villemain, in the new edition of his 'Essay upon Shakspeare,' published in 1839, gives us as much interjectional eulogy of our national poet as might satisfy the most eager appetite of those admirers who think such praise worth anything. The French critic, of nearly a century later than Voltaire, holds that Shakspeare has no other system than his genius. It is in this chaos that we must seek his splendour. His absurdities, his buffooneries, belong to the gross theatre of his period. In judging Shakspeare we must reject the mass of barbarism and false taste with which he is surcharged. But then, apart from any system, "*quelle passion! quelle poésie! quelle éloquence!*" "This rude and barbarous genius discovers an unknown delicacy in the development of his female characters." And why? "The taste which is so often missing in him is here supplied by a delicate instinct, which makes him even anticipate what was wanting to the civilization of his time." The critic reposes somewhat on English authority:—"Mrs. Montagu has repelled the contempt of Voltaire by a judicious criticism of some defects of the French theatre, but she cannot palliate the enormous extravagancies of the pieces of Shakspeare. Let us not forget, she says, that these pieces were played in a miserable inn before an unlettered audience,

scarcely emerging out of barbarism."* But Mrs. Montagu is not alone in this. Others, as angry with Voltaire as prodigal of their admiration of Shakspeare, quietly surrender what Voltaire really attacks, forgetting that his praises have been nearly as strong, and sometimes a little more judicious than their own. Hear MARTIN SHERLOCK apostrophizing Shakspeare:—

"Always therefore study Nature.

"It is she who was thy book, O Shakspeare; it is she who was thy study day and night; it is she from whom thou hast drawn those beauties which are at once the glory and delight of thy nation. Thou wert the eldest son, the darling child, of nature; and like thy mother, enchanting, astonishing, sublime, graceful, thy variety is inexhaustible. Always original, always new, thou art the only prodigy which nature has produced. Homer was the first of men, but thou art more than man. The reader who thinks this eulogium extravagant is a stranger to my subject. To say that Shakspeare had the imagination of Dante, and the depth of Machiavel, would be a weak encomium: he had them and more. To say that he possessed the terrible graces of Michael Angelo, and the amiable graces of Correggio, would be a weak encomium: he had them, and more. To the brilliancy of Voltaire he added the strength of Demosthenes; and to the simplicity of La Fontaine the majesty of Virgil.—But, say you, we have never seen such 'a being.' You are in the right; Nature made it, and broke the mould."

This is the first page of 'A Fragment on Shakspeare' (1786). The following is an extract from the last page:—"The only view of Shakspeare was to make his fortune, and for that it was necessary to fill the play-house. At the same time that he caused a duchess to enter the boxes, he would cause her servants to enter the pit. The people have always money; to make them spend it, they must be diverted; and Shakspeare forced his sublime genius to stoop to the gross taste of the populace, as Sylla jested with his soldiers."

* 'Essai sur Shakspeare, Paris, 1839.

DAVID HUME, the most popular historian of England, thus writes of Shakspeare:—"Born in a rude age and educated in the lowest manner, without any instruction either from the world or from books." The consequence of this national and individual ignorance was a necessary one:—"A reasonable propriety of thought he cannot for any time uphold." What right have we to abuse Voltaire, when we hear this from an English writer of the same period? We fully agree with Schlegel in this matter:—"That foreigners, and Frenchmen in particular, who frequently speak in the most strangelanguage of antiquity and the middle ages, as if cannibalism had been first put an end to in Europe by Louis XIV., should entertain this opinion of Shakspeare, might be pardonable; but that Englishmen should adopt such a calumny of that glorious epoch of their history, in which the foundation of their greatness was laid, is to me incomprehensible."* But it is not wholly incomprehensible. Schlegel has in part explained it:—"I have elsewhere examined into the pretensions of modern cultivation, as it is called, which looks down with such contempt on all preceding ages. I have shown that it is all little, superficial, and unsubstantial at bottom. The pride of what has been called the present maturity of human reason has come to a miserable end; and the structures erected by those pedagogues of the human race have fallen to pieces like the baby-houses of children." So far, of the critical contempt of the age of Shakspeare. Schlegel again, with equal truth, lays bare the real character of the same critical opinions of the poet himself:—"It was, generally speaking, the prevailing tendency of the time which preceded our own, a tendency displayed also in physical science, to consider what is possessed of life as a mere accumulation of dead parts; to separate what exists only in connection and cannot otherwise be conceived, instead of penetrating to the central

* 'Lectures on Dramatic Literature,' Black's translation.

point, and viewing all the parts as so many irradiations from it. Hence, nothing is so rare as a critic who can elevate himself to the contemplation of an extensive work of art. Shakspeare's compositions, from the very depth of purpose displayed in them, have been exposed to the misfortune of being misunderstood. Besides, this prosaical species of criticism applies always the poetical form to the details of execution; but, in so far as the plan of the piece is concerned, it never looks for more than the logical connection of causes and effects, or some partial and trivial moral by way of application; and all that cannot be reconciled to this is declared a superfluous, or even a detrimental, addition. On these principles we must equally strike out most of the choral songs of the Greek tragedies, which also contribute nothing to the development of the action, but are merely an harmonious echo of the impression aimed at by the poet. In this they altogether mistake the rights of poetry and the nature of the romantic drama, which, for the very reason that it is and ought to be picturesque, requires richer accompaniments and contrasts for its main groups. In all art and poetry, but more especially in the romantic, the fancy lays claim to be considered as an independent mental power governed according to its own laws."

The translation of Schlegel's work in 1815, in conjunction with the admirable lectures of Coleridge, gave a new direction amongst the thinking few to our national opinion of Shakspeare. Other critics of a higher school than our own race of commentators had preceded Schlegel in Germany; and it would be perhaps not too much to say that, as the reverent study of Shakspeare has principally formed their æsthetic school, so that æsthetic school has sent us back to the reverent study of Shakspeare. He lived in the hearts of the people, who knew nothing of the English critics. The learned, as they were called, understood him least. Let the lovers of truth rejoice that their despotism is over.

CHAPTER V.

CAPELL.—FARMER.—STEEVENS.—MALONE.—GARRICK.—RICHARDSON.—MORGANN.—WHATELY.—PERCY.—WARTON.—LAMB.—HAZLITT.—COLERIDGE.

OUR notice of Shakspeare's critics has now led us to what may be called the second race of commentators.

The English editors of Shakspeare have certainly brought to their task a great variety of qualities, from which combination we might expect some very felicitous results. They divide themselves into two schools, which, like all schools, have their subdivisions. Rowe, Pope, Theobald, Hanmer, Johnson, belong to the school which did not seek any very exact acquaintance with our early literature; and which probably would have despised the exhibition, if not the reality, of antiquarian and bibliographical knowledge. A new school arose, whose acquaintance with what has been called black-letter literature was extensive enough to produce a decided revolution in Shakspearean commentary. Capell, Steevens, Malone, Reed, Douce, are the representatives of the later school. The first school contained the most brilliant men; the second, the most painstaking commentators. The dullest of the first school,—a name hung up amongst the dunces by his rival editor,—poor, "piddling Tibbald," was unquestionably the best of the first race of editors. Rowe was indolent; Pope, flashy; Warburton, paradoxical; Johnson, pedantic. Theobald brought his common sense to the task, and has left us, we cannot avoid thinking, the best of all the conjectural emendations. Of the other school, the real learning, and sometimes sound judgment, of Capell, is buried in an obscurity of thought and style,—to say nothing of his comment being printed separately from his text,—which puts all ordinary reading for purposes of information at complete defiance. Of Steevens and Malone, they have had, more or less, the glory of having linked themselves to Shakspeare during the last half century. Reed

and Chalmers were mere supervisors and abridgers of what they did.

The edition of CAPELL was published in ten small octavo volumes, three years after that of Johnson—that is, in 1768. His preface is printed in what we call the variorum editions of Shakspeare, but Steevens has added to it this depreciating note:—"Dr. Johnson's opinion of this performance may be known from the following passage in Mr. Boswell's 'Life of Dr. Johnson':—'If the man would have come to me, I would have endeavoured to endow his purpose with words, for, as it is, he doth gabble monstrously.'" Certainly "the man" does write a most extraordinary style; and it is impossible to do full justice to his edition, from the great bulk of the notes and various readings "being published in a separate form," with references to previous editors so obscure and perplexed that few would take the trouble to attempt to reach his meaning. Capell was a man of fortune; and he devoted a life to this labour, dying in the midst of it. Steevens never mentions him but to insult him; and amongst the heaps of the most trashy notes that encumber the variorum editions, raked together from the pamphlets of every dabbler in commentary, there is perhaps not one single-minded quotation from Capell. John Collins, the publisher of his posthumous Notes and Various Readings, brings a charge against Steevens which may account for this unrelenting hostility to a learned and amiable man labouring in a pursuit common to them both. He says that Capell's edition "is made the groundwork of what is to pass for the genuine production of these combined editors" (Johnson and Steevens). This, he says, may be proved by a comparison of their first edition of 1773 with that of Johnson's of 1765, Capell's having been published during the interval.

He then proceeds further in the charge:—
 “But the re-publication of their work, as it ‘is revised and augmented,’ makes further advances upon the same plan, abounding with fresh matter and accumulated evidence in proof of the industry with which the purloining trade has been pursued, and of the latitude to which it has been extended, in each of the above-mentioned particulars. For, differing as it does from its former self in numberless instances, in all of them it is still found to agree with that edition, which, we are gravely told in so many words by the apparent manager of the business, ‘has not been examined beyond one play.’”

But there was another cause of the hostility of Steevens and his school of commentators. FARMER was their Coriphæus. Their souls were prostrate before the extent of his researches in that species of literature which possesses this singular advantage for the cultivator, that, if he studies it in an original edition, of which only one or two copies are known to exist (the merit is gone if there is a baker’s dozen known), he is immediately pronounced learned, judicious, laborious, acute. And this was Farmer’s praise. He wrote, ‘An Essay on the Learning of Shakspeare,’ which has not one passage of solid criticism from the first page to the last, and from which, if the name and the works of Shakspeare were to perish, and one copy—an unique copy is the affectionate name for these things—could be miraculously preserved, the only inference from the book would be that William Shakspeare was a very obscure and ignorant man, whom some misjudging admirers had been desirous to exalt into an ephemeral reputation, and that Richard Farmer was a very distinguished and learned man, who had stripped the mask off the pretender. The first edition of Farmer’s pamphlet appeared in 1767.

Capell, who had studied Shakspeare with far more accuracy than this mere pedant, who never produced any literary performance in his life except this arrogant pamphlet, held a contrary opinion to Farmer:—
 “It is our firm belief that Shakspeare was very well grounded, at least in Latin, at

school. It appears, from the clearest evidence possible, that his father was a man of no little substance, and very well able to give him such education; which, perhaps, he might be inclined to carry further, by sending him to a university; but was prevented in this design (if he had it) by his son’s early marriage, which, from monuments and other like evidence, it appears with no less certainty must have happened before he was seventeen, or very soon after: the displeasure of his father, which was the consequence of this marriage, or else some excesses which he is said to have been guilty of, it is probable drove him up to town; where he engaged early in some of the theatres, and was honoured with the patronage of the earl of Southampton: his ‘Venus and Adonis’ is addressed to that Earl in a very pretty and modest dedication, in which he calls it ‘the first heire of his invention;’ and ushers it to the world with this singular motto:—

‘Vilia miretur vulgus, mihi flavus Apollo
 Pocula Castalia plena ministret aqua;’

and the whole poem, as well as his ‘Lucrece,’ which followed it soon after, together with his choice of those subjects, are plain marks of his acquaintance with some of the Latin classics, at least, at that time. The dissipation of youth, and, when that was over, the busy scene in which he instantly plunged himself, may very well be supposed to have hindered his making any great progress in them; but that such a mind as his should quite lose the tincture of any knowledge it had once been imbued with cannot be imagined: accordingly we see that this school-learning (for it was no more) stuck with him to the last; and it was the recordations, as we may call it, of that learning which produced the Latin that is in many of his plays, and most plentifully in those that are the most early: every several piece of it is aptly introduced, given to a proper character, and uttered upon some proper occasion; and so well cemented, as it were, and joined to the passage it stands in, as to deal conviction to the judicious, that the whole was wrought up together, and fetched from his own little store, upon the sudden, and without study.

"The other languages which he has sometimes made use of—that is, the Italian and French—are not of such difficult conquest that we should think them beyond his reach. An acquaintance with the first of them was a sort of fashion in his time. Surrey and the sonnet-writers set it on foot, and it was continued by Sidney and Spenser: all our poetry issued from that school; and it would be wonderful indeed if he, whom we saw a little before putting himself with so much zeal under the banner of the Muses, should not have been tempted to taste at least of that fountain to which of all his other brethren there was such a continual resort: let us conclude, then, that he did taste of it; but, happily for himself, and more happy for the world that enjoys him now, he did not find it to his relish, and threw away the cup. Metaphor apart, it is evident that he had some knowledge of the Italian—perhaps just as much as enabled him to read a novel or a poem, and to put some few fragments of it, with which his memory furnished him, into the mouth of a pedant or fine gentleman.

"How or when he acquired it we must be content to be ignorant; but of the French language he was somewhat a greater master than of the two that have gone before; yet, unless we except their novelists, he does not appear to have had much acquaintance with any of their writers; what he has given us of it is merely colloquial, flows with great ease from him, and is reasonably pure. Should it be said he had travelled for it, we know not who can confute us."

The principle of Capell's edition, as described by himself in the title-page, was to give the plays of Shakspeare as "set out by himself in quarto, or by the players, his fellows, in folio." His introduction consists of an analysis of the value of these various authorities; and he discriminates very justly between those plays in quarto which "have much resemblance to those in the folio," and those which were "first drafts or else imperfect and stolen copies." His text is formed upon this discriminating principle, not attaching an equal value to all the original copies in quarto, or superseding the text

of the folio by thrusting in passages out of the first drafts and imperfect copies. To say that his text is the result invariably of a sound judgment would be to say too much; and indeed some of his emendations approach a little to the ridiculous. But we have no hesitation in saying that it is a better text, because approaching more nearly to the originals, than that of many of those who came after him, and went on mending and mending for half a century till the world was tired with the din of their tinkering. The race which succeeded him was corrupted by flattery. Take a specimen:—"Shakspeare's felicity has been rendered complete in this age. His genius produced works that time could not destroy: but some of the lighter characters were become illegible; these have been restored by critics whose learning and penetration have traced back the vestiges of superannuated opinions and customs. They are now no longer in danger of being effaced."* These critics had an accurate perception of part of their duty when they set out upon their work. The first labour of STEEVENS, which preceded the edition of Capell by two years, was to reprint in fac-simile "twenty of the plays of Shakspeare, being the whole number printed in quarto during his lifetime, or before the Restoration; collated where there were different copies, and published from the originals." Most accurately did he execute this laborious duty. The two great public libraries of England, the British Museum and the Bodleian, possess all the originals. The next progressive movement of Steevens was still in the same safe path. He became united with Johnson in the edition of 1773. In his advertisement he says,—"The labours of preceding editors have not left room for a boast that many valuable readings have been retrieved; though it may be fairly asserted that the text of Shakspeare is restored to the condition in which the author, or rather his first publishers, appear to have left it, such emendations as were absolutely necessary alone admitted." He defines what are absolutely necessary, such as a supply of particles when indispensable to

* Mrs. Montagu:—'Introduction.'

the sense. He rejects with indignation all attempts to tamper with the text by introducing a syllable in aid of the metre. He declines suggestions of correspondents "that might have proved of great advantage to a more daring commentator." Upon such safe foundations was the edition of 1773 reared. In 1778 it was "revised and augmented," and in 1785 it was reprinted with additions by Isaac Reed, Steevens having declined the further care of the work. Steevens also in 1779 rendered an acceptable service to the students of our dramatic history, by the publication of 'Six old plays, on which Shakspeare founded his Measure for Measure, Comedy of Errors. Taming the Shrew, King John, King Henry IV., King Henry V., and King Lear.' In 1780 MALONE appeared as an editor of Shakspeare. He came forward with 'A Supplement' to the edition of 1778, in which he republished the poems of Shakspeare, and the seven doubtful plays which had been printed as his in the third and fourth folios. The encouragement which he had received induced him, in 1790, when Steevens had retired from his editorial labours in connection with the bookseller's edition, to publish a complete edition of his own, but which was still a variorum edition, "with the corrections and illustrations of various commentators." In this first appeared his 'Dissertation on the Three Parts of Henry VI.,' and his 'Historical Account of the English Stage.' Malone professes the same anxiety to adhere to the genuine text of Shakspeare as Steevens had professed before him; but he opened a wide field for editorial licence, in his principle of making up a text out of the folio edition and the previous quartos; and, to add to the apparent value of his own labours, he exaggerated, as others have since done, the real value of these quartos:—"They *in general* are preferable to the exhibition of the same plays in the folio; for this plain reason, because, instead of printing these plays from a manuscript, the editors of the folio, to save labour, or from some other motive, printed the greater part of them from the very copies which they represented as maimed and imperfect, and fre-

quently from a late, instead of the earliest, edition; in some instances with additions and alterations of their own." This is not an accurate statement of the question; for the large additions to the folio copy when compared with the quartos, the careful emendations, and even the omissions, which are seldom without some sound apparent reason, could not have been the additions and alterations of the editors of the folio, but must have been the result of the author's labours, perhaps during a series of years.

It appears from Malone's preface that a feeling was gaining ground that the constant accession of notes to Shakspeare was becoming an evil:—"The admirers of this poet will, I trust, not merely pardon the great accession of new notes in the present edition, but examine them with some degree of pleasure.—An idle notion has been propagated that Shakspeare has been *buried under his commentators*; and it has again and again been repeated by the tasteless and the dull, 'that notes, though often necessary, are *necessary evils*.' During the era of conjectural criticism and capricious innovation, notes were indeed evils: while one page was covered with ingenious sophistry in support of some idle conjecture, and another was wasted in its overthrow, or in erecting a new fabric equally unsubstantial as the former. While our object is to support and establish what the poet wrote, to illustrate his phraseology by comparing it with that of his contemporaries, and to explain his fugitive allusions to customs long since disused and forgotten,—while this object is kept steadily in view, if even every line of his plays were accompanied with a comment, every intelligent reader would be indebted to the industry of him who produced it. Such uniformly has been the object of the notes now presented to the public. Let us then hear no more of this barbarous jargon concerning Shakspeare's having been *elucidated into obscurity*, and buried under the load of his commentators." There is a great deal of truth in this; but it is not all the truth. Malone disagrees with the following observation of Johnson:—"It is not (he remarks) very grateful to

consider how little the succession of editors has added to this author's power of pleasing. He was read, admired, studied, and imitated, while he was yet deformed with all the improprieties which ignorance and neglect could accumulate upon him." The new editor, with a pardonable complacency towards his calling, says,—“He certainly was read, admired, studied, and imitated at the period mentioned; but surely not in the same degree as at present. The succession of editors has effected this; it has made him understood; it has made him popular; it has shown every one who is capable of reading how much superior he is not only to Jonson and Fletcher, whom the bad taste of the last age from the time of the Restoration to the end of the century set above him, but to all the dramatic poets of antiquity.” Jonson and Fletcher were not set above Shakspeare, as we have demonstratively shown, from the time of the Restoration to the end of the century. But, even if they were, it was not the succession of editors that had made Shakspeare popular. A plain reprint of Shakspeare without a single note, but with the spelling modernized, would have made him more popular than all the critical editions which the eighteenth century had produced. Malone says, that during that century “thirty thousand copies of Shakspeare have been dispersed through England.” The number would have been quadrupled if Shakspeare had been left to his own unaided power. Much of what the commentators did, especially in the illustration of Shakspeare's phraseology and the explanation of his fugitive allusions, they did well. But they must needs be critics, without having any system of criticism more profound than the easy task of fault-finding; and thus they rendered Shakspeare less popular than he would have been in an age when criticism was little understood, and men's eyes were dazzled by an array of names to support some flippant remark upon Shakspeare's want of art, some exhibition of his ignorance, some detection of his anachronisms, some discovery of a quibble beyond the plain meaning of the word. It is scarcely possible to read a scene of the variorum

Shaksperes without feeling the utter want of a reverent spirit towards the author. These things sank more deeply into the minds of the readers of Shakspeare than the general expressions of the commentators' admiration; which after all seemed little more than compliments to themselves in their association with the poet. Schlegel, we cannot but acknowledge, has stated the truth with tolerable exactness:—“Like Dante, Shakspeare has received the indispensable but cumbersome honour of being treated like a classical author of antiquity. The oldest editions have been carefully collated, and where the readings seemed corrupted many improvements have been attempted; and the whole literature of his age has been drawn forth from the oblivion to which it had been consigned, for the sake of explaining the phrases, and illustrating the allusions, of Shakspeare. Commentators have succeeded one another in such numbers, that their labours, with the critical controversies to which they have given rise, constitute of themselves a library of no inconsiderable magnitude. These labours are deserving of our praise and gratitude; and more especially the historical inquiries into the sources from which Shakspeare drew his materials, and into the former state of the English stage. But, with respect to the criticisms which are merely of a philological nature, I am frequently compelled to differ from the commentators; and where they consider him merely as a poet, endeavour to pronounce upon his merits, and to enter into his views, I must separate myself from them entirely. I have hardly ever found either truth or profundity in their observations; and these critics seems to me to be but stammering interpreters of the general and almost idolatrous admiration of his countrymen.”*

The editors of the first collection of the works of Shakspeare, in their ‘Address to the great Variety of Readers,’ say—“Read him therefore; and again, and again: and, if then you do not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger not to understand him.”

* ‘Lectures on Dramatic Literature,’ Black's Translation, vol. ii. p. 103.

This was advice that could not have proceeded from any common mind. The foundation of a right understanding of Shakspeare is love. Steevens read again and again without love, and therefore without understanding. Boswell, the editor of Malone's posthumous edition, speaking of a note on 'Hamlet,' says, that Steevens has expressed himself "with as much asperity as if he had had a personal quarrel with the author." Steevens had a pettifogging mind, without a particle of lofty feeling, without imagination, without even a logical apprehension of the small questions to which he applied himself. But he was wonderfully laborious. Knowing nothing of the principles of philosophical criticism, he spared no pains in hunting up illustrative facts; he dabbled in classical learning so as to be able to apply a quotation with considerable neatness; and he laboured his style into epigrammatic smartness which passed for wit. The vicious style of the letters of Junius was evidently his model; and what that cowardly libeller had been in the political world Steevens was ambitious to be in the literary. He very often attacked, under a mask, those with whom he mixed in intimate companionship; till at last his name became a byword for meanness and malignity. It was impossible that such a man could have written about Shakspeare without displaying "as much asperity as if he had had a personal quarrel with him." And yet he was to be pitied. Like Hamlet, he had a task laid upon him above his powers. Early in life he attached himself to literature and literary pursuits, not from any necessity, for his fortune was ample, but with a real and sincere devotion. He attached himself to Shakspeare. He became an editor of Shakspeare. He was associated with Johnson in the preparation of an edition, and what he did in his own way was far superior to what his colleague had effected without him. He gave a new tone to the critical illustration of Shakspeare, by bringing not only the elegant literature of Shakspeare's own age to compare with him, but by hunting over all the sweepings of the book-stalls of the same age, to find the application of a familiar allusion, or the mean-

ing of an uncommon word. But he became ambitious to show his power of writing, as well as his diligence. If we turn over the variorum editions, and light upon a note which contains something like a burst of genial admiration for the author, we find the name of Warburton affixed to it. Warburton's intellect was capacious enough for love of Shakspeare. But he delighted in decorating his opinions with the tinsel of his own paradoxes. Steevens was the man to pull off the tinsel; but he did it after the fashion in which the lace was stripped from Brother Jack's coat:—"Courteous reader, you are given to understand that zeal is never so highly obliged as when you set it a-tearing; and Jack, who doted on that quality in himself, allowed it at this time its full swing. Thus it happened that, stripping down a parcel of gold lace a little too hastily, he rent the main body of his coat from top to bottom; and, whereas his talent was not of the happiest in taking up a stitch, he knew no better way than to darn it again with packthread and a skewer."* The zeal for tearing increased with Steevens. He retired for fifteen years from the editorship of Shakspeare, to recreate himself in the usual way in which such minds find diversion—by anonymous attacks upon his literary contemporaries. But in 1793 he returned with renewed vigour to his labour of love, the defacing of Shakspeare. Malone, in the interval, had been working hard, though perhaps with no great talent, in the endeavour to preserve every vestige of his author. He was successful, and Steevens was thenceforward his enemy. He would no longer walk in the path that he had once trod. He rejected all his old conservative opinions. In his edition of 1793, he sets out in his Advertisement with the following well-known manifesto against a portion of the works of Shakspeare, the supposed merit or demerit of which, it is perfectly evident, must have been applied as a standard for other portions of Shakspeare's poetical excellence:—"We have not reprinted the Sonnets, &c., of Shakspeare, because the strongest Act of Parliament that could be framed would fail to compel readers

* 'Tale of a Tub.'

into their service; notwithstanding these miscellaneous poems have derived every possible advantage from the literature and judgment of their only intelligent editor, Mr. Malone, whose implements of criticism, like the ivory rake and golden spade in Prudentius, are on this occasion disgraced by the objects of their culture. Had Shakspeare produced no other works than these, his name would have reached us with as little celebrity as time has conferred on that of Thomas Watson, an older and much more elegant sonneteer." Brother Jack is here not only tearing the coat, but throwing the waistcoat into the fire. Let us hear how he means to deal with the coat itself:—"But, as we are often reminded by our 'brethren of the craft' that this or that emendation, however apparently necessary, is not the *genuine text of Shakspeare*, it might be imagined that we had received this text from its fountain-head, and were therefore certain of its purity. Whereas few literary occurrences are better understood than that it came down to us discoloured by 'the variation of every soil' through which it had flowed, and that it stagnated at last in the muddy reservoir of the first folio: in plainer terms, that the vitiations of a careless theatre were seconded by those of as ignorant a press. The integrity of dramas thus prepared for the world is just on a level with the innocence of females nursed in a camp and educated in a bagnio. As often, therefore, as we are told that, by admitting corrections warranted by common sense and the laws of metre, we have not rigidly adhered to the text of Shakspeare, we shall entreat our opponents to exchange that phrase for another 'more germane,' and say, instead of it, that we have deviated from the text of the publishers of single plays in quarto, or their successors, the editors of the first folio; that we have sometimes followed the suggestions of a Warburton, a Johnson, a Farmer, or a Tyrwhitt, in preference to the decisions of a Hemings or a Condell, notwithstanding their choice of readings might have been influenced by associates whose high-sounding names cannot fail to enforce respect, viz., William Ostler, John Shanke,

William Sly and Thomas Poope." Again:—"It is time, instead of a timid and servile adherence to ancient copies, when (offending against sense and metre) they furnish no real help, that a future editor, well acquainted with the phraseology of our author's age, should be at liberty to restore some apparent meaning to his corrupted lines, and a decent flow to his obstructed versification. The latter (as already has been observed) may be frequently effected by the expulsion of useless and supernumerary syllables, and an occasional supply of such as might fortuitously have been omitted, notwithstanding the declaration of Hemings and Condell, whose fraudulent preface asserts that they have published our author's plays 'as absolute in their numbers as he conceived them.' Till somewhat resembling the process above suggested be authorized, the public will ask in vain for a commodious and pleasant text of Shakspeare. Nothing will be lost to the world on account of the measure recommended, there being folios and quartos enough remaining for the use of antiquarian or critical travellers, to whom a jolt over a rugged pavement may be more delectable than an easy passage over a smooth one, though they both conduct to the same object."

And this, then, is the text of Shakspeare that England has rejoiced in for half a century! These are the labours, whether of correction or of critical opinion, that have made Shakspeare "popular." The critical opinions have ceased, we believe, to have any effect except amongst a few pedantic persons, who fancy that it is cleverer to dispraise than to admire. But the text as corrupted by Steevens is that which is generally put into the hands of the readers of Shakspeare. The number of editions of the text alone of Shakspeare printed during the present century is by no means inconsiderable; and of these editions, which are constantly multiplying, there are many thousand copies year by year supplying the large and increasing demand for a knowledge of our greatest poet. With very few exceptions, indeed, all these editions are copies of some edition whose received text is considered as

a standard—even to the copying of typographical errors. That received text, to use the words of the title-page of what is called the trade edition, is "From the text of the corrected copies left by the late George Steevens, Esq., and Edmund Malone, Esq." If we were to suppose, from this title, that Steevens and Malone had agreed together to leave a text for the benefit of posterity, we should be signally deceived. The received text is that produced by Steevens, when he fancied himself "at liberty to restore some apparent meaning to Shakspeare's corrupted lines, and a decent flow to his obstructed versification." Malone was walking in his own track, that of extreme caution, and an implicit reliance on the very earliest copies. The text of his edition of 1821, though deformed with abundant marks of carelessness, is an honest text, if we admit the principle upon which it is founded. But the text of Steevens, in which the peculiar versification of Shakspeare, especially its freedom, its vigour, its variety of pause, its sweetness, its majesty, are sacrificed to what he called "polished versification," has been received for nearly half a century as the standard text.

Hayley, the head of the school of English poetry "in the most high and palmy state" of Steevens, wrote his epitaph, which concludes with these lines:—

"This tomb may perish, but not so his name,
Who shed new lustre upon Shakspeare's
fame."

This may run by the side of Johnson's praise of a sermonizing note of Warburton:—"It almost sets the critic on a level with the author." Steevens, shedding new lustre upon Shakspeare! Warburton, almost upon a level with Shakspeare! Thus men talked in those days, when their notion of poetry was simply that it was not prose. Something in which the mechanical form was to be obviously distinguished from other forms of composition—a sermon, an essay—was poetry. They looked for no inner life in poetry, no organization of its own, that should determine its form. They looked for eight or ten syllable verse, for blank verse or couplet. They

looked for syllabic regularity in Shakspeare, and a moral. When they found not the moral, they shook their heads. When they found what they called "superfluous syllables" in Shakspeare's lines, out went the syllables, by carrying over a word to the next line, sometimes of two, sometimes of three syllables. If there was a gap left, it was filled up with rubbish. The excess of the second line was carried over to the third, till a halting-place was found or made. This was mending the metre. Mending the moral was not quite so easy to the editors; they left that task to the players, who, to do them justice, were in no degree slow to set about the work with the most laudable emulation of the labours of the critics. They cut out a scene here, and put in another there. 'Lear' was to end with a jig, and 'Hamlet' with a song. The manager-botchers, however, in time grew timid. They wanted new Tates to make new happy endings, but the age of George III. was not luxuriant enough to produce such daring geniuses. The managers, therefore, were obliged to be content with the glorious improvements of the seventeenth century in all essentials. But they did what they could. Shakspeare's songs were poor simple things; they had no point; not much about love in them; nothing of loyalty; and so Shakspeare's comedies were always presented with new songs by the salaried poet of "the house," for "the house" kept a poet, as the maker of razor-strops did in those days. But GARRICK, the twin-star of Shakspeare—

"Shakspeare and Garrick like twin-stars shall
shine,
And earth irradiate with a beam divine"—

had many a twinkle of his own. In the 'Biographia Dramatica' we have a list of thirty-nine plays by Garrick:—"He is well known to have been the author of the following, some of which are originals, and the rest translations or alterations from other authors, with a design to adapt them to the present taste of the public." (A predecessor printed upon the title of a tragedy of which in a similar way he was "the author," 'King Lear, a Tragedy: by Nahum Tate.')

Garrick's Shakspearean authorship was confined to 'Romeo and Juliet,' 'The Fairies' ('Midsummer Night's Dream'), 'The Tempest,' 'Catherine and Petruchio' ('Taming of the Shrew'), 'Florizel and Perdita' ('Winter's Tale'), 'Cymbeline,' 'Hamlet.' This was pretty well for a twin-star. Is it uncharitable to infer that the Stratford Jubilee in 1769 was something as much for the honour of David Garrick as of William Shakspeare? On this memorable occasion the corporation of Stratford opened their proceedings by thus addressing Garrick:—"Sir, you who have done the memory of Shakspeare so much honour are esteemed the fittest person to be appointed the first steward of his jubilee." The ode upon dedicating the town-hall, and erecting a statue to Shakspeare, was written by Garrick, as well as spoken by him. It is quite as good as birthday odes used to be. It would be beyond our limits to describe the effect which this ode produced; how rapturous was the public dinner; how brilliant were the transparencies in the hall; and how appropriate were the characters of the masquerade, at which a thousand persons were present. Garrick spoke an oration in honour of Shakspeare, and thus he honours him:—"We get knowledge from Shakspeare, not with painful labour, as we dig gold from the mine, but at leisure, and with delight, as we gain health and vigour from the sports of the field. A picture frequently pleases which represents an object that in itself is disgusting. Teniers represents a number of Dutch boors drunk and quarrelling in a wretched hovel, and we admire the piece for a kind of relative beauty, as a just imitation of life and nature: with this beauty we are struck in Shakspeare; we know his originals, and contemplate the truth of his copy with delight."

This is the narrow view of the art of Shakspeare which Johnson impressed upon his pupil. We read on, and we are bewildered. Slightly have we spoken of Garrick, because we felt that to do what he has done with the masterpieces of Shakspeare, and especially with 'Hamlet,' was to show that he did not understand them. But there is something in this 'Oration in Honour of

Shakspeare,' spoken by him at Stratford in 1769, and written by him, as it is said, which shows to us that the author of that oration, or parts of that oration, was far in advance of the critical opinions of his day. Let us present a consecutive passage which immediately follows that already transcribed:—"It was happy for Shakspeare, and for us, that in his time there was no example by the imitation of which he might hope to be approved. *He painted nature as it appeared to his own eye, and not from a transcript of what was seen in nature by another.* The genius looks not upon nature, but through it; not at the outline only, but at the differences, nice and innumerable, within it; at all that the variation of tints, and the endless combinations of light and shade, can express. As the power of perception is more, more is still perceived in the inexhaustible varieties of life; but to copy only what another has seen is to render superior perspicacity vain; and neither the painter nor the poet can hope to excel who is content to reflect a reflection, and to seek for nothing in nature which others have not found.

"But there are beauties in Shakspeare not relative—powers that do not imitate, but create. He was as another Nature: he represents not only actions that were not performed, but beings that do not exist; yet to these beings he assigns not only faculties, but character; he gives them not only peculiar dispositions, but characteristic modes of expressing them: they have character, not merely from the passions and understandings, but from situation and habit; Caliban and Ariel, like Shallow and Falstaff, are not more strongly distinguished in consequence of different natures than of different circumstances and employments.

"As there was no poet to seduce Shakspeare into imitation, there was no critic to restrain his extravagance; yet we find *the force of his own judgment sufficient to rein his imagination, and to reduce to system the new world which he made.*

"Does any one now inquire whether Shakspeare was learned? Do they mean whether he knew how to call the same thing by several names? for learning, with respect to

languages, teaches no more ; learning, in its best sense, is only nature at the rebound ; it is only the discovery of what is ; and he who looks upon nature with a penetrating eye derives learning from the source. *Rules of poetry have been deduced from examples, and not examples from rules* : as a poet, therefore, Shakspeare did not need books ; and in no instance in which he needed them as a philosopher or historian does he appear ignorant of what they teach.

"His language, like his conceptions, is strongly marked with the characteristic of nature ; it is bold, figurative, and significant ; his terms, rather than his sentences, are metaphorical ; he calls an endless multitude a sea, by a happy allusion to the perpetual succession of wave to wave ; and he immediately expresses opposition by taking up arms, which, being fit in itself, he was not solicitous to accommodate to his first image. This is the language in which a figurative and rapid conception will always be expressed : this is the language both of the prophet and the poet, of native eloquence and divine inspiration.

"It has been objected to Shakspeare that he wrote without any moral purpose ; but I boldly reply that he has effected a thousand. He has not, indeed, always contrived a series of events from the whole of which some moral precept may be inferred ; but he has conveyed some rule of conduct, some principle of knowledge, not only in almost every speech of his dialogue, but in every incident, character, and event."

We would attempt to deprive no man of his fame ; but the passage which we have just transcribed appears to us so contrary to the habits of thought which Garrick must have acquired from his theatrical practice, so opposed to the recorded opinions to which he was in the habit of looking up almost with slavish reverence, that we cannot receive the records of the Stratford Jubilee as evidence that he wrote it. What—was the manufacturer of Shakspeare's plays into farces, and operas, and tragedies with moral endings, to be the first man in England to discover that Shakspeare was a creator ; that he lived in a world of his own creation ; that the

practice of art went before the rules ; that the question of his learning was to be settled contrary to the way in which the pedants of criticism had settled it, by the proof that his knowledge was all-abundant ; that his judgment was sufficient to rein his imagination ; that he worked upon system, and was therefore an artist in the highest sense of the word ; that what has been called the confusion of his metaphors was the language both of the prophet and the poet ; that his moral purpose was to be collected incidentally, not only through informal speeches, but in every character and event ? The beginning and the end of Garrick's oration is commonplace. Here is a flood of light shed upon the English opinion of Shakspeare. Was there any man in England, at that time, whose philosophy was large enough, whose knowledge was comprehensive enough, to allow him to think thus ? Was there any man in England who dared so to express himself, in the face of authorities who had so recently propounded a totally different system ? There was but one man that we can dream of, and he was Edmund Burke. We cannot think that Garrick wrote these sentences. We can hardly think that he knew the full force of what he was uttering.

It would be a dreary task to attempt to trace all that was published about Shakspeare from the date of Johnson's first edition to the close of the eighteenth century. A few out of the heap of these forgotten emanations of the critical mind, the multitude of which proves the strong direction of the national admiration, may not be unprofitably noticed. Johnson, when he has dismissed Shakspeare from the shackles of the unities, says, "I am almost frightened at my own temerity." He dreaded the advocates of a contrary opinion, "as Æneas withdrew from the defence of Troy when he saw Neptune shaking the wall." A Neptune arrived from Scotland in the shape of 'Cursory Remarks on Tragedy.' This work, though it dropped into oblivion, was the performance of W. RICHARDSON, "Professor of Humanity in the University of Glasgow." A small specimen will suffice :—"with an impartiality which becomes every man that dares to think for

himself, let us allow him (Shakspeare) great merit as a comic writer, greater still as a poet, but little, very little, as a tragedian. . . . And is, then, poor Shakspeare to be excluded from the number of great tragedians? He is; but let him be banished, like Homer from the republic of Plato, with marks of distinction and veneration; and may his forehead, like the Grecian bard's, be bound with an honourable wreath of ever-blooming flowers." There can be no doubt of the paternity of this production. The same Professor of Humanity in the University of Glasgow produced, in the same year, 'A Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakspeare's Characters;' and this book has gone, with the appendage of new characters, through many editions; and is allied, moreover, to Essays on this and that Shakspearean thing, and a "perilous shot" indeed in 'An Essay on the Faults of Shakspeare.' We shall give no more than a sentence:—"I am inclined to believe, and shall now endeavour to illustrate that the greatest blemishes in Shakspeare have proceeded from his want of consummate taste. Having no perfect discernment, proceeding from rational investigation, of the true cause of beauty in poetical composition, he had never established in his mind any system of regular process, or any standard of dramatic excellence." Yet this solemn person, who thinks that Shakspeare had never established in his mind any system of regular process, had no perfect discernment of the true cause of beauty, has the temerity to write a book of four hundred pages on his dramatic characters. Something of a very different description was produced three years after: 'An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff.' The author was MAURICE MORGANN, once Under Secretary of State. The book is far above the age. The author is a thinker, and one who has been taught to think by Shakspeare. Take an example:—"In the groups of other poets, the parts which are not seen do not, in fact, exist. . . . Those characters in Shakspeare, which are seen only in part, are yet capable of being unfolded and understood in the whole; every part being, in fact, relative,

and inferring all the rest." The 'Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakspeare,' by Thomas Whately, published in 1785, is something different from the performance of the Scotch professor. What could induce his eminent relation, who republished it in 1839, to write thus?—"Mr. Whately, it should be observed, is merely pointing out that such and such speeches *do* indicate character; not that they were, in each case, written with that *design*. If, then, they really *are* characteristic, the criticism is fully borne out, whatever may have been the design of Shakspeare. I doubt whether Shakspeare ever had any thought at all of making his personages speak characteristically. In most instances, I conceive—probably in all—he drew characters correctly, because he *could not avoid it*, and would never have attained, in that department, such excellence as he has, if he had made any studied efforts for it. And the same, probably, may be said of Homer, and of those other writers who have excelled the most in delineating characters." Was the 'Paul preaching at Athens,' with the Apostle characterised in his majesty, the sceptic in his doubt, and the enthusiast in his veneration, (characters marked as deeply as the Richard and Macbeth upon which the relation of the Archbishop of Dublin writes,)—was this produced by Raffaele because he could not avoid it? We would willingly give an extract or two from this clever book, but its republication renders such unnecessary. There is one more work, and one only, to which we may point as being superior to the ordinary criticism of that age—"the butter-woman's rank to market." It is Mr. Whiter's 'Specimen of a Commentary on Shakspeare,' published in 1794.

Amidst the crowd of writers, from the middle to the end of the eighteenth century, who were adding to the mass of comment upon Shakspeare, whether in the shape of essay, letter, poem, philosophical analysis, illustration, there was one who, not especially devoting himself to Shakspearean criticism, had a considerable influence in the gradual formation of a sound national taste. The 'Reliques of Ancient English Poetry,' by

THOMAS PERCY, originally published in 1765, showed to the world that there was something in the early writers beyond the use to which they had been applied by Shakspeare's commentators. In these fragments it would be seen that England, from the earliest times, had possessed an inheritance of real poetry; and that he who had breathed a new life into the forms of the past, and had known how to call up the heroes of chivalry,—to

“Enlive their pale trunks, that the present age
Joys in their joy, and trembles at their rage,”

was not without models of earnest passion and noble simplicity in the ancient ballads. The publication of these ‘Reliques’ led the way, though slowly, to the study of our elder poets; and every advance in this direction was a step towards the more extended knowledge, and the better understanding, of Shakspeare himself. Percy, in one part of his first volume, collected “such ballads as are quoted by Shakespeare, or contribute in any degree to illustrate his writings.” He did this with his usual good taste; and every one knows with what skill he connected in the tale of ‘The Friar of Orders Grey’ those “innumerable little fragments of ancient ballads” which we find dispersed through the plays of Shakspeare. In his introduction to this division of his work he gives some very sensible observations upon the origin of the English stage. In the following remarks on the Histories of our poet he takes a different, and we think a juster, view of their origin and purpose than Malone and the other commentators. Although Percy puts his own opinions cautiously, if not timidly, it is clear that he had higher notions of Shakspeare as an artist than those who were arrogating to themselves the merit of having made him “popular.” He who holds that it is “the first canon of sound criticism to examine any work by whatever rule the author prescribed for his own observance” is not far from a right appreciation of Shakspeare:—“But, while Shakespeare was the favourite dramatic poet, his Histories had such superior merit, that he might well claim to be the chief, if not the only, historic dramatist that

kept possession of the English stage; which gives a strong support to the tradition mentioned by Gildon, that, in a conversation with Ben Jonson, our bard vindicated his historical plays, by urging that, as he had found ‘the nation in general very ignorant of history, he wrote them in order to instruct the people in this particular.’ This is assigning not only a good motive, but a very probable reason, for his preference of this species of composition, since we cannot doubt but his illiterate countrymen would not only want such instruction when he first began to write, notwithstanding the obscure dramatic chroniclers who preceded him, but also that they would highly profit by his admirable Lectures on English History so long as he continued to deliver them to his audience. And, as it implies no claim to his being the *first* who introduced our chronicles on the stage, I see not why the tradition should be rejected.

“Upon the whole, we have had abundant proof that both Shakespeare and his contemporaries considered his Histories, or Historical Plays, as of a legitimate distinct species, sufficiently separate from Tragedy and Comedy; a distinction which deserves the particular attention of his critics and commentators, who, by not adverting to it, deprive him of his proper defence and best vindication for his neglect of the unities and departure from the classical dramatic forms. For, if it be the first canon of sound criticism to examine any work by whatever rule the author prescribed for his own observance, then we ought not to try Shakespeare’s Histories by the general laws of tragedy or comedy. Whether the rule itself be vicious or not, is another inquiry: but, certainly, we ought to examine a work only by those principles according to which it was composed. This would save a deal of impertinent criticism.”

‘The History of English Poetry,’ by THOMAS WARTON, published in 1774, was another of those works which advanced the study of our early literature in the spirit of elegant scholarship as opposed to bibliographical pedantry. Warton was an ardent lover of Shakspeare, as we may collect from

several little poems; but he was scarcely out of the trammels of the classical school. His education had taught him that Shakspeare worked without art, and indeed he held that most of the Elizabethan poets so worked:—"It may here be added that only a few critical treatises, and but one 'Art of Poetry,' were now written. Sentiments and images were not absolutely determined by the canons of composition; nor was genius awed by the consciousness of a future and final arraignment at the tribunal of taste. A certain dignity of inattention to niceties is now visible in our writers. Without too closely consulting a criterion of correctness, every man indulged his own capriciousness of invention. The poet's appeal was chiefly to his own voluntary feelings, his own immediate and peculiar mode of conception. And this freedom of thought was often expressed in an undisguised frankness of diction; a circumstance, by the way, that greatly contributed to give the flowing modulation which now marked the measures of our poets, and which soon degenerated into the opposite extreme of dissonance and asperity. Selection and discrimination were often overlooked. Shakespeare wandered in pursuit of universal nature. The glancings of his eye are from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven. We behold him breaking the barriers of imaginary method. In the same scene he descends from his meridian of the noblest tragic sublimity to puns and quibbles, to the meanest merriment of a plebeian farce. In the midst of his dignity he resembles his own Richard II., the *skip-ping king*, who sometimes, discarding the state of a monarch,

'Mingled his royalty with carping fools.'

He seems not to have seen any impropriety in the most abrupt transitions, from dukes to buffoons, from senators to sailors, from counsellors to constables, and from kings to clowns. Like Virgil's majestic oak—

'Quantum vertice ad auras
Æthereas, tantum radice in Tartara tendit.'

All this is prettily said; but it would not have been said if Warton had lived half a century later. Scattered about the periodi-

cal 'Essayists' are many papers on Shakspeare, worth consulting by the student, which, if not very valuable in themselves, indicate at least the progress of opinion. Joseph Warton, in 'The Adventurer,' where he reviews 'The Tempest' and 'Lear,' is a great stickler for the unities. Mackenzie, in 'The Mirror,' has a higher reverence for Shakspeare, and a more philosophical contempt for the application of the ancient rules to works having their own forms of vitality. Cumberland, in 'The Observer,' contrasts 'Macbeth' and 'Richard III.;' and he compares Shakspeare with Æschylus in a way which exhibits the resources of his scholarship and the elegance of his taste. All the fragmentary critical opinions upon Shakspeare, from the time of Johnson's Preface to the end of the century, exhibit some progress towards the real faith; some attempt to cast off not only the authority of the ancient rules of art, but the smaller authority of that lower school of individual judgment, which the Shakspearean commentators had been propping up, as well as they could, upon their own weak shoulders. Coleridge has well described their pretensions to authority:—"Every critic, who has or has not made a collection of black-letter books,—in itself a useful and respectable amusement,—puts on the seven-league boots of self-opinion, and strides at once from an illustrator into a supreme judge, and, blind and deaf, fills his three-ounce phial at the waters of Niagara; and determines positively the greatness of the cataract to be neither more nor less than his three-ounce phial has been able to receive." Such a critic was Mr. Francis Douce; who has been at the pains of making a formal essay 'On the Anachronisms and some other Incongruities of Shakspeare.' The words by which Mr. Douce describes these are, of course, "absurdities," "blunders," "distortions of reality," "negligence," "absurd violations of historical accuracy." Some concessions are, however, made by the critic:—"His bestowing the epithet of *gipsy* on Cleopatra is whimsical; but may, perhaps, admit of defence." It is perfectly clear that a man who talks thus has not the slightest philosophical comprehension of the

objects of Art, and the mode in which Art works. The domain of the literal and the ideal is held to be one and the same. It is truly said of the formative arts, by a living painter who knows the philosophy of his own art as much as he excels in its practice, that "a servile attention to the letter of description, as opposed to its translateable spirit, accuracy of historic details, exactness of costume, &c., are not essential in themselves, but are valuable only in proportion as they assist the demands of the art, or produce an effect on the imagination. This may sufficiently explain why an inattention to these points, on the part of great painters (and poets, as compared with mere historians), has interfered so little with their reputation."*

One of the critics upon Shakspeare has sought to apologize for his anachronisms or "absurdities" by showing the example of the greatest of painters, that of Raffaello, in the 'Transfiguration':—"The two Dominicans on their knees are as shocking a violation of good sense, and of the unities of place, of time, and of action, as it is possible to imagine." It is clear that Martin Sherlock, who writes thus, did not understand the art of Raffaello. This was the spirit of all criticism upon painting and upon poetry. The critic never laboured to conceive the great prevailing idea of "the maker" in either art. He had no central point from which to regard his work. The great painters, especially in their treatment of religious compositions, had their whole soul permeated with the glory and beauty of the subjects upon which they treated. Their art was in itself a worship of the Great Infinite Idea of beauty and truth. The individual forms of humanity, the temporary fashions of human things, were lifted into the region of the universal and the permanent. The Dominicans on their knees in the 'Transfiguration' were thus the representatives of adoring mortality during the unfolding to the bodily sense of heavenly glory. Who can see the anachronism, as it is called, till a small critic points it out?

* Preface to Kugler's 'History of Painting,' by C. L. Eastlake, Esq., R. A.

Art changes the very nature of those elements by which the imagination is affected. She touches them, and the things are propertied for her use. What is mean, separately considered, is harmonised by her into greatness; what is rude, into beauty; what is low, into sublimity. We fear that it was a want of comprehending the high powers and privileges of Art, whether in poetry or painting, that made the 'Shakspeare Gallery,' which, towards the end of the last century, was to raise up an historic school of painting amongst us, a lamentable failure. The art of painting in England was to do homage to Shakspeare. The commercial boldness of a tradesman built a gallery in which the Reynoldses, and Wests, and Romneys, and Fuselis, and Northcotes, and Opies, might consecrate, by the highest efforts of painting, the inspiration which was to be borrowed from Shakspeare. The gallery was opened; the works were munificently paid for; they were engraved; the text of Shakspeare was printed in larger type than the world had ever seen, to be a fit vehicle for the engravings. People exclaimed that Italy was outdone. With half a dozen exceptions, who can now look upon those works and not feel that the inspiration of Shakspeare was altogether wanting? It is not that they violate the proprieties of costume, which are now better understood; it is not that we are often shocked by the translation of a poetical image into a palpable thing—like the grinning fiend in Reynolds's 'Death of Beaufort;' but it is that the Shakspearean inspiration is not there. Lord Thurlow is reported to have said, in his coarse way, to one not wanting in talent, "Romney, before you paint Shakspeare, do, for God's sake, read him." But the proper reading of Shakspeare was not the fragmentary reading which Thurlow probably had in his mind. The picturesque passages are to be easily discovered by a painter's eye; but these are the things which most painters will literally translate. Shakspeare is always injured by such a literal translation. Deeply meditated upon, his scenes and characters float before the mind's eye in forms which no artifices of theatrical illusion, no embodiments of painting and sculpture, have ever

presented. If such visions are to be fixed by the pencil, so as to elevate our delight and add to our reverence of the great original, that result must be attained by such a profound study of the master, as a whole, as may place him in the light of the greatest of *suggestive* poets, instead of one whose details are to be enfeebled by a literal transcript.

We have little of importance left to notice before we reach the close of the eighteenth century, about which period we ought to rest. Opinions upon our contemporaries, except very general ones, would be as imprudent as misplaced. Perhaps we should notice in a few words the extraordinary forgeries of WILLIAM HENRY IRELAND. We consider them as the result of the all-engrossing character of Shakspearean opinion in the days of the rivalries and controversies of Steevens and Malone, of Ritson and Chalmers:—

“Take Markham’s Armoury, John Taylor’s Sculler,
Or Sir Giles Goosecap, or proverbial Fuller;
With Upton, Fabell, Dodypoll the nice,
Or Gibbe our cat, White Devils, or Old Vice;
Then lead your readers many a precious dance,
Capering with Banks’s ‘Bay Horse in a Trance:’
The ‘Housewife’s Jewel’ read with care exact,
Wit from old Books of Cookery extract;
Thoughts to stew’d prunes and kissing comfits suit,
Or the potato, vigour-stirring root;
And then, returning from that antique waste,
Be hail’d by Parr the Guide of Public Taste.”*

A clever boy, who had a foolish father whose admiration of Shakspeare took the form of longing, with an intensity which Mrs. Pickle could not have equalled, for the smallest scraps of Shakspeare’s writing, thought he would try his hand at the manufacture of a few such scraps—a receipt; a mortgage-deed; a Protestant Confession of Faith by William Shakspeare, to be placed in opposition to another forgery of a Roman Catholic Confession of Faith. This precious

production thus concludes:—“O cheryshe usse like the sweete Chickenne thatte under the covert offe herre spreadynge Winges Receyves herre lyttle Broode ande hoverynge overre themme keepes themme harmlesse ande in safetye.” Learned men came to read the confession of faith, and one affirmed that it was finer than anything in the Church Liturgy. Witty conundrums succeeded; letters to Anne Hathaway; memorandums connected with the theatre; a new edition of ‘King Lear,’ with the author’s last alterations; and, to crown the whole, an original play, ‘Vortigern and Rowena.’ The boy was evidently imbued with the taste of his time, and really fancied that he could mend Shakspeare. Hear one of his confessions:—“In King Lear the following lines are spoken by Kent after the King’s death:—

‘I have a journey, sir, shortly to go:
My master calls, and I must not say no.’

As I did not conceive such a jingling and unmeaning couplet very appropriate to the occasion, I composed the following lines:—

‘Thanks, sir; but I go to that unknown land
That chains each pilgrim fast within its soil;
By living men most shunn’d, most dreaded.
Still my good master this same journey took:
He calls me; I am content, and straight obey:

Then, farewell, world! the busy scene is done:

Kent liv’d most true, Kent dies most like a man.’”

The documents were published in the most expensive form. All the critics in the land came to look upon the originals. Some went upon their knees and kissed them. The “black-letter dogs” began to tear each other in pieces about their authenticity. Hard names were given and returned; dunce and blockhead were the gentlest vituperations. The whole controversy turned upon the colour of the ink, the water-mark of the paper, the precise mode of superscription to a letter, the contemporary use of a common word, the date of the first use of promissory notes, the form of a mortgage. Scarcely one of the learned went boldly to the root of the imposture, and showed that Shakspeare could

* ‘Pursuits of Literature.’

not have written such utter trash. The case of Chatterton was altogether a different one. There, indeed, was high genius wrongfully employed; but the enthusiastic admiration of the thing produced might well shut the eyes of the most acute to the inconsistencies which surrounded it. Not so with the new treasures which William Henry Ireland discovered from the pen of Shakspeare. The *people*, however, settled the question. The play was brought out at Drury Lane: and the prologue by Sir James Bland Burgess is another instance of the mode in which the poetasters and witlings venerated Shakspeare:—

“From deep oblivion snatch’d, this play appears:

It claims respect, since Shakspeare’s name it bears;

That name, the source of wonder and delight,
To a fair hearing has at least a right.

We ask no more. With you the judgment lies:

No forgeries escape your piercing eyes!

Unbiass’d, then, pronounce your dread decree,

Alike from prejudice or favour free.

If, the fierce ordeal pass’d, you chance to find

Rich sterling ore, *though rude and unrefin’d*,
Stamp it your own, assert your poet’s fame,
And add fresh wreaths to Shakspeare’s honour’d name.”

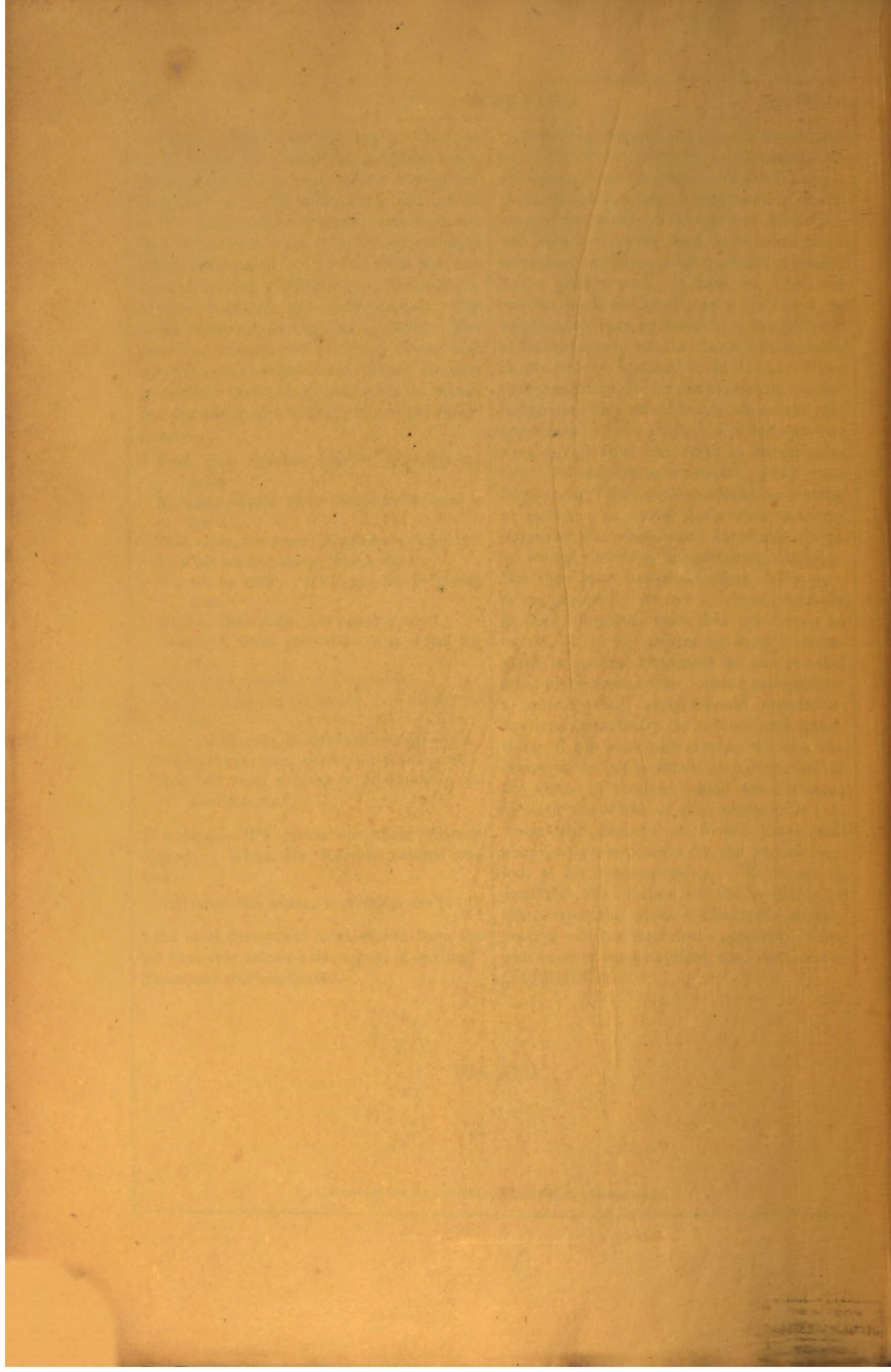
The people did pronounce their “dread decree.” When Mr. Kemble uttered the line—

“And when this solemn mockery is o’er”—

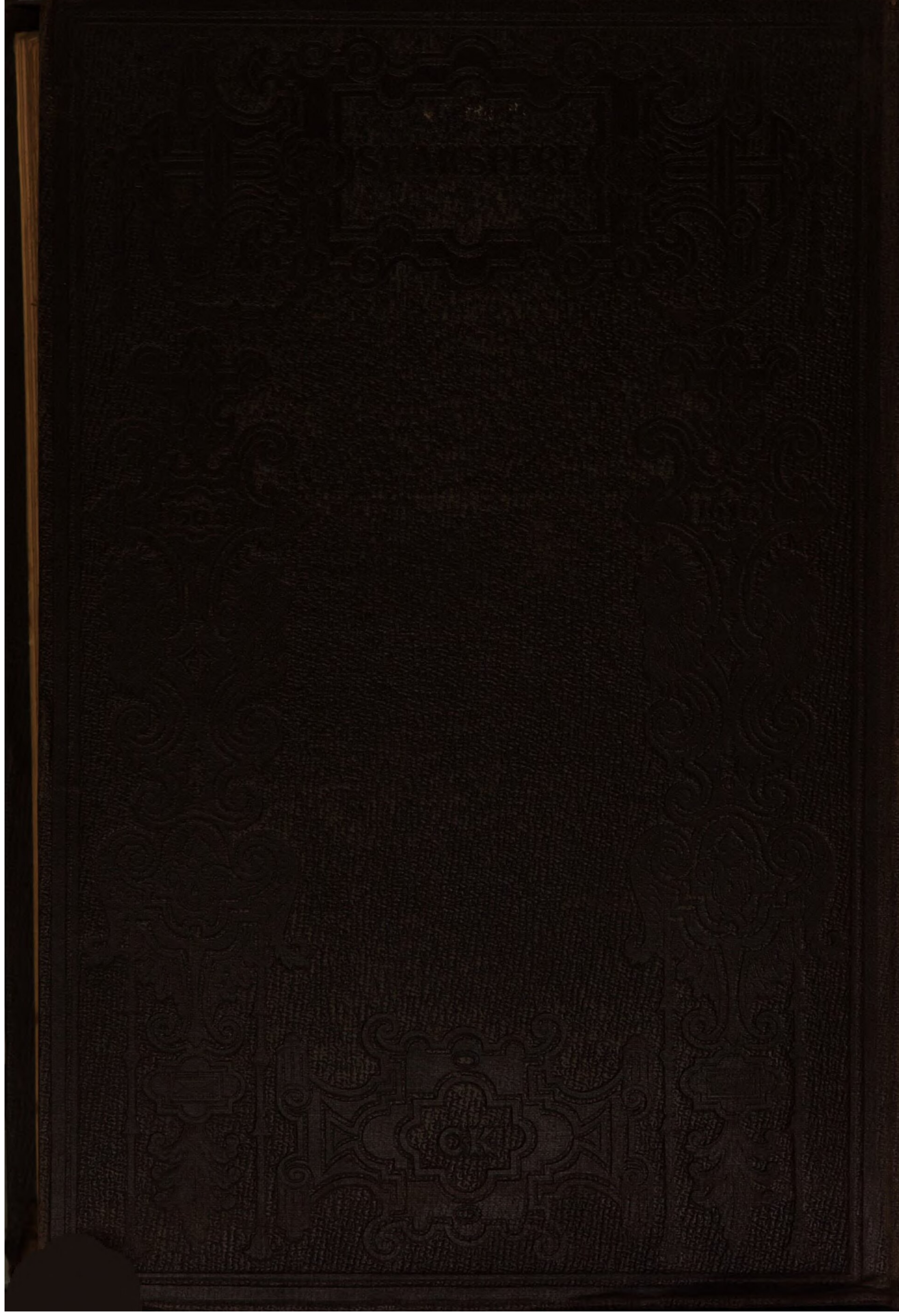
“the most discordant howl echoed from the pit that ever assailed the organs of hearing.” Shakspeare was vindicated.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century a new school of criticism began to establish itself amongst us. CHARLES LAMB and WILLIAM HAZLITT led the way in approaching Shakspeare, if not wholly in the spirit of *Æsthetics*, yet with love, with deep knowledge, with surpassing acuteness, with unshackled minds. But a greater arose. A new era of critical opinion upon Shakspeare, as propounded by Englishmen, may be dated from the delivery of the lectures of SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE, at the Surrey Institution, in 1814. What that great man did for Shakspeare during the remainder of his valuable life can scarcely be appreciated by the public. For his opinions were not given to the world in formal treatises and ponderous volumes. They were fragmentary; they were scattered, as it were, at random; many of them were the oral lessons of that wisdom and knowledge which he poured out to a few admiring disciples. But they have had their effect. For ourselves, personally, we owe a debt of gratitude to that illustrious man that can never be repaid. If in any degree we have been enabled to present Shakspeare to the popular mind under new aspects, looking at him from a central point, which should permit us, however imperfectly, to comprehend something of his wondrous SYSTEM, we owe the desire so to understand him ourselves to the germs of thought which are scattered through the works of that philosopher; to whom the homage of future times will abundantly compensate for the partial neglect of his contemporaries. We desire to conclude this outline of the opinions of others upon the works of Shakspeare, in connection with the imperfect expression of our own sense of those opinions, with the name of COLERIDGE.

THE END.



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Studies and Illustrations of the Writings of Shakspere and of his Life and
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